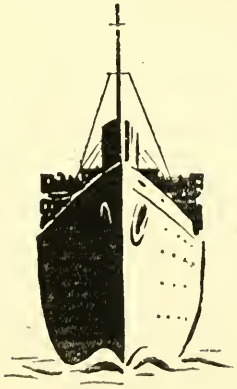
The scene of

NOAH'S ARK

is a modern liner. Far too many novels have had a similar setting, but we do not know of one which approaches the same realism of atmosphere, or which penetrates so deeply into the odd relationships which sea-voyages establish between members of the human race.

The story in this book is unimportant. One of our readers made this a point of criticism in her report. But the indistinct impression which remains at the end is not very different from the impression left at the end of all sea-voyages.

In the book there is drama. The drama of men and women in love ; of men and women who have grown tired ; of men and women stripped of pretence. There is humour too, pathos, tragedy and little sad incidents which touch the heart.



Also by

S. W. POWELL

A Trader's Tale

May and December

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Autobiography of a Rascal

etc.

NOAH'S ARK

A novel by

S. W. POWELL

Decorated by
BIP PARES

London
SELWYN & BLOUNT

CHAPTER ONE

THE BLUE PETER WAS FLYING ABOVE THE "DIDO." IT was scarcely necessary, for her approaching departure was obvious.

She lay beside a wharf in Woolloomooloo Bay, and the wharf was thronged with people. The blue sky of Sydney arched the scene. Cranes, whose actions were like the intelligent actions of humans, were picking up nets full of luggage and placing them in the hold. Not always neatly or gently, and so again displaying a human character. Photographers had their cameras levelled, hawkers were selling reels of coloured streamers; women were smiling fixedly; men were stolid. On ship and on shore many were wearying, for long-drawn farewells are a tiring business. At length a coloured reel was thrown aboard. That, thank God, was the beginning of the end!

The boatswain was standing idly by a companion-ladder connecting the promenade deck with the after well-deck. He was a well-grown man of audacious appearance, of slack, careless carriage, but nautically graceful. "A blade" a woman in the steerage had already privately called him. He was clothed in an emphatic masculinity which no woman could miss.

He was the sailor who has a wife in every port and a mistress in every ship.

The fourth officer joined him.

"Seen anything you fancy, bos'n?" he asked, quizzically.

"Swell little piece over there, sir," the boatswain answered, nodding at a girl who was standing at the ship's side with other passengers. "A shiner. But she's no good. I caught her eye. She wasn't having any."

A practical amorist and shrewd, the boatswain could tell at a glance what was game and what was not. He had very little conceit and no illusions.

His eye continued to rove over the people on the well-deck and poop, which, with part of the lower promenade deck, comprised the third-class deck space. It rested upon a young woman, and she looked round. Her gaze for a moment was considerative. She seemed to be estimating the boatswain, body and soul. Then she smiled and looked away.

"Clicked!" said the boatswain softly, and with a satisfied air. His search was ended. The voyage had started well.

The fourth officer laughed and made a quick run down the companion-ladder. He had business on the poop. The boatswain too had business to do shortly, and without another look at the quarry he had marked he ambled forward. No more fear of failure entered his mind than enters the mind of the expert elephant-hunter who has chosen his next kill. The affair was one of routine.

A bank of coloured streamers dipped from the rails of the ship to the crowded wharf. The gangway was not

out yet. Smiles were wilting. At last the ship vibrated, the ditch of green water slowly began to widen, the streamers to lengthen and break. One remained, seemingly of elastic. It snapped, fluttered despairingly, dragged in the water, was dropped, and the ship was free. Another end had merged in a new beginning. The passengers sighed with relief. Then they looked at one another with interest for the first time. These people, this herd of rather repellent strangers, were to be their associates for six weeks. Disquieting thought. Depressing.

That was the general feeling. There were exceptions, of course. For example, there were the children, all of whom were in a state of happy excitement. Two, a boy and a girl, came running up to a man and woman on the poop.

" Oh, dad ! " said the boy. " There's our Sunday-school teacher, Miss Bodle, down below there ! "

" There's our Sunday-school teacher, Miss Bodle, down below there, mum ! " repeated the girl, not to be robbed of the pleasure of giving the news.

" Is there ? " said the father, in a rising tone.

The mother's tone was flat. " Is there ? Well, you meet all sorts of people on a ship like this."

The little girl turned to her father. She was not going to be dashed by this dull comment on a startling piece of intelligence.

" Isn't it wonderful, dad ? Miss Bodle, our Sunday-school teacher ! "

" Sure it's her ? " he said. He had a rather melancholy face, dark eyes and a drooping dark moustache. He was dressed like a prosperous workman, which he was. The mother was stout. She might have been

good-looking once, but her face had coarsened. Her mouth was drawn down at the corners. She looked at the world aggressively and with discontent.

"Sure?" said the boy and girl together. "Why, she's been speaking to us. Come, and we'll take you to her."

"But I don't know her," said the father. "Not to speak to. You come, mother."

"I'm going below to unpack," she answered shortly. "And you two, Ben and Ida, mind you don't get climbing on the rails or looking down the ventilators. I'll smack you if I catch either of you doing things like that."

The father followed the children to the well-deck. A girl had her back to the bulwarks, looking up. She was the girl whom the boatswain had declared to be no good. She deserved his epithet "shiner"; but it was clear that she was not one of the boatswain's sort. There was a mother-o'-pearl delicacy about her; something of the sweetness and quietness of old Dresden. A straw bonnet and full skirts would have suited her well. She suggested the fragrance of honeysuckle.

It was Ida who performed the introduction.

"We've brought our father, Miss Bodle," she said. "You know him, don't you?"

Miss Bodle smiled. "I know Mr. Chisman by sight," she answered, and shook hands. "I'm so glad there are people I know on board."

"Her name's Nellie, and my father's name's Ernest," said Ben, "so now you know all about each other."

Miss Bodle and Mr. Chisman laughed embarrassedly.

" You shouldn't have said that," Ida corrected her brother. " They aren't supposed to know each other's first names. It isn't proper, is it, Miss Bodle ? "

" Well, perhaps it isn't quite," Miss Bodle admitted. " But I don't know that it matters much."

" Are you going to England too ? " asked Mr. Chisman.

She was, and he was pleased. He had feared that she might be going no farther than Melbourne. Then he wondered why the children had not known that she was to be a fellow-passenger.

" I heard a long time ago," she said, " that you were going to England, but the children said you were going by the *Torres*."

" So we were," answered Mr. Chisman ; " but we couldn't get a four-berth cabin, so we had to come in the *Dido*."

" Oh, I see. And I've been away, you know. I only made up my mind a fortnight back to take the trip."

Mr. Chisman wished to say that he was very glad she had, but he was afraid it would sound too pointed from a married man, and she a Sunday-school teacher. It wasn't the actual words that he was afraid of, but of the way he'd say them. For he knew, beyond any doubt, that he was very glad. She was like water in a desert. He did not specify what he meant by the desert ; but perhaps Mrs. Chisman was part of it.

" Well, it's very nice to see a face we know," he said, which was a safe remark, however one said it. " Are you travelling alone ? " he added.

" All alone," she laughed. " There was no one to

go with me, and I've wanted to take a trip to England for years."

"You'll be glad enough to get back," he said with emphasis.

"Then why are you going?" she asked in surprise. Chisman, she knew, was English. She was an Australian.

"My wife couldn't stick Australia. It's good enough for me. But it's no use a man trying to stay where his wife isn't contented. So we just upped sticks and off." Chisman's voice was momentarily sad, and betrayed a tincture of bitterness. He put a brighter note in it. "Oh, I can stick Old Blighty, but I'd choose Australia if I was a single man. More sun, you know, and not so much wet and cold; and my work's out of doors."

"Oh, yes. You're a sign-painter, aren't you?"

He was pleased that she knew what his trade was. It didn't follow that because she taught his children she had to take notice of him, in a place the size of Sydney. He'd taken notice of her, but that was another matter. She was a girl to take notice of. Once he'd nearly made up his mind to go to church, but he knew that smiles would go round when the chaps heard of it ("Something doing, old man, eh? What have you got your eye on?"), and, anyhow, he could do no more than look at her. She lived only two streets away, but Ann hardly knew her except as the Sunday-school teacher. They hadn't a chance to meet—and a fat lot of good it would be to him if they had.

But in this respect the case appeared to have altered. It *was* good to have met her and be going to England with her. Chisman had the odd feeling that he and

she were the only people in the ship. The rest, including Ann, had faded to shadows.

"You're just going for a trip, are you?" he said. The children were watching with interest this meeting between their father and the admired Miss Bodle, and drew from it a flattering sense of importance in that they had brought it about.

"That's all." She paused. "An aunt of mine died a little while ago, and left me a hundred and fifty pounds. So I thought, here's my chance; perhaps it'll never come again."

That, then, was the explanation. Chisman had wondered. She was only a saleswoman in a draper's shop, and trips to England cost a bit. He knew. This trip was going to cost him a pretty penny before he got into work again. And all because a woman nagged and grumbled till you just had to give in to her. A long time ago, he recalled at times, Ann had been his wife. Now she was just a woman, a burden laid on him, to be worn round his neck till he died. And without complaint. You couldn't complain aloud, for the children's sake. You just had to make the best of her, as if she were an act of God. He didn't hate her. Not at all. But she was hard to suffer sometimes.

A bell clanged loudly and deeply in the ship's belly.

"Dinner!" said Mr. Chisman. "Have you got a seat, Miss Bodle?"

"You must sit beside us!" cried the children, before Miss Bodle could answer.

"But I'm afraid I can't," she replied. "You see, I've got a seat, and I don't suppose I can change it."

Chisman thought that she might, but he did not say

so. He would rather, and he had an idea that she would rather, that they were not together at meals. It would be like Ann to make things uncomfortable for her.

"Well, perhaps we shall see you after dinner," he remarked, and took the children's hands.

"Oh, I hope so!" she said.

Chisman saw her face flush as he left her. She had spoken rather warmly. He was thrilled. He made his way to his cabin to find his encumbrance.

In going he passed the boatswain, whose cabin was at the after end of the well-deck. The boatswain was already in connection with the young woman who had smiled at him.

"You come along any time you like," he was saying. "There's always a bottle of beer here."

She giggled. "And the rest," she said.

"No games," said the boatswain. "Nothing but what you're willing to play at." He spoke with bluff sincerity. "I don't take fancies often, but I've took a fancy to you. Straight. You could do what you liked with me."

"Oh, I know all about you sailors. That's an old tale. Tell us something new."

The boatswain whispered something. It may not have been new, but it seemed to tickle her. She ran off, smothering her laughter.

Complacently the boatswain watched her go. Quite plain sailing this was to be. He much preferred that.

The carpenter passed him. "Bit of a breeze outside," he said.

The *Dido* had left the calm of the harbour and was

running between the Heads. There were whitecaps on the Pacific, little dabs of Chinese white flecking the deep blue.

"Yes," answered the boatswain, "it's the last feed some of them will want for a day or two."

CHAPTER TWO

THE "DIDO" PITCHED A LITTLE WHEN SHE WAS OUTside, and adopted a gentle roll after she had turned. There were fewer people on deck than when she had left the wharf, but normal stomachs so far were unaffected. Chairs were out and the passengers were settling. They were not yet generally mingling. They were still detached and unsympathetic atoms.

A middle-aged gentleman, pacing the first-class upper promenade deck, was another of those exceptions previously mentioned. The company of all these strangers, and the six weeks' prospect of it, did not in the least depress him. He viewed them with pleasure, not with antipathy. He meant to enjoy them all.

Mr. Amersham was known among his intimates as a close observer of men, women and things. Observation was supposed to be his hobby. In fact he allowed that it was.

He was a Civil Servant. His health had been poor lately, and a doctor had recommended him for six months' leave, and privately advised a sea voyage.

"Sea air," said the doctor, "does wonderful things. Sea air is what will set you up. You have overworked."

Having both the will and the wherewithal (he was

a bachelor) Mr. Amersham had taken a return ticket to London.

He had felt a great deal better ever since. The mere anticipation of the holiday and change had begun the cure. Having said good-bye to sympathising friends, there was no longer need to conceal this fact. Inflating his chest with the strong air, Mr. Amersham paced the deck with the foot of youth. Of youth three sheets in the wind, for he had not got his sea-legs yet.

After half an hour of this exercise he remembered that he had not to over-exert himself. He stood where the boatswain and the fourth officer had stood, by the after rail. From here, by turning his eyes to left or right, he could survey both classes of passengers. The *Dido* carried no second. Her third-class accommodation was said to be equal to second, so that a second class would have been a redundancy. The Company stressed this point. There was a tinge of truth in the assertion.

Looking to his left up the long promenade, Mr. Amersham saw the purser. He knew the purser slightly, through a mutual friend, an official of the Company. The purser was strolling towards him with enviable equipoise. He stopped on reaching Mr. Amersham.

"Taking observations?" he said. He had heard of Mr. Amersham's hobby, if "hobby" is not too petty a name for it. "Shrewd observer, Amersham," the Company's official had said to him.

In reply, Mr. Amersham confessed that he was taking a look round.

"We've one or two celebrities aboard," the purser continued, "and others that aren't exactly celebrities

but people of some interest. If you like, I can point some of them out to you."

"I should be immensely obliged," Mr. Amersham answered. He did not specialise in celebrities: his outlook was catholic: but he did not, as some do, despise the famous.

"Well," began the purser, "that chap in the chair nearest to us"—he carefully looked at Mr. Amersham—"is Major Pageant, V.C. Perhaps you've forgotten him, or never heard of him."

"I remember the name—and it's such an odd name," said Mr. Amersham, screwing up his lean face. "I *must* have heard of him. The War, wasn't it?—Why, yes, didn't he become a popular hero for capturing a German machine-gun single-handed?"

"Machine-gun and trench with a dozen men in it. One of those miraculous exploits. Well, that's the man. Looks quiet enough, doesn't he?"

"They always do, those dare-devil fellows," said Mr. Amersham. "Not always," he corrected himself, as this, for a close observer, was a somewhat sweeping statement. "But very often, I've noticed."

The major was reading a book. He was young—in his early forties, perhaps, and, except for a soldierly figure, there was nothing to suggest the hero in him. He had a small moustache and rather small features, and was neither dark nor fair. His hair was thin and smooth and he was well groomed.

"We should never trust appearances," Mr. Amersham remarked; and the purser agreed.

"Do you see that old lady?" he went on. "The one in black silk, with the beautiful white hair? Now I wonder if you know who that is?"

" I've been looking at her every time I passed her. But she isn't *old*, my dear fellow : a bit old-fashioned, yes. Her hair's white, but her face is quite young. I can't remember ever having seen a more beautiful face or a more distinguished one. Who in the world is she ? "

" You'd know if you'd been in London twenty years ago. That's Hilda Marmion, the actress. She's on a pleasure tour."

" Why, of course, why didn't I think of that ? I saw her name in the papers. So that's the famous Hilda Marmion ! Well, I should never have taken her for an actress. There's nothing theatrical about her."

" There isn't. She looks just what she is—Hilda Marmion at the age of sixty-nine. She makes no pretence of being young, you see ; but there's no need : she'll always be lovely."

" She's like a portrait by a great master. One of those old historical things, you know. It's a pleasure and a privilege merely to look at her. Hullo ! who's that sitting down by her ? " said Mr. Amersham jealously. " Is he an actor too ? He's a bit like her in a way."

" He is, a bit ; but he's not an actor. That's Oswald Straker, the novelist."

" Ah," said Mr. Amersham, " I should have guessed that in a minute. The Sydney papers have been full of him lately."

" Yes, of course he's still in the limelight and likely to stay there. Seems good for a few years yet, doesn't he ? "

" At a distance he doesn't look much more than thirty."

" He looks older without that cap. His hair's white too. They ought to make a match of it," the purser laughed. " Shall we take a walk round ? There are one or two more people I might show you, though those three are all the lions. Oh, hold on, here comes one fellow."

A man came striding towards them past the line of chairs. He had just emerged from below and was clad in white flannel trousers and a white sweater. All eyes were focused on him. He claimed attention. His step was swift and light, he swung his arms ; he was big, he had a presence.

" An athlete of some sort," said Mr. Amersham, as, with a spacious gesture to the purser, the pedestrian turned the corner.

" An actor," the purser smiled. " We brought him out six months ago. He's been on tour. Martin Sale's his name. I don't suppose you ever heard of him."

" I can't say I have."

" He's not very prominent. We always have an actor or two aboard."

" But why does he walk as if he were in for a foot race ? "

" To keep in condition, I understand. He walks like that for an hour and a half every day."

" What won't some men do for notoriety ? " said Mr. Amersham. " He can't need all that exercise to keep in condition."

" He's not a bad sort, all the same. He certainly does like to be noticed, but his weakness is a harmless one."

They followed slowly in the actor's wake. When they reached the starboard side he was disappearing.

Here the chairs were in greater numbers, for this was the lee side.

"There's room for plenty more," observed the purser. "But young folks like Miss Marmion and Mr. Straker don't care for the weather, of course."

"Very true. Most successful people are hardy. They have to be, to succeed."

"The lady and gentleman beside that ventilator," said the purser, "are a Mr. and Mrs. Fleetwood. He's been building a big dam in New Zealand. Belongs to a London firm of engineers."

Mr. Amersham stole a glance at the pair in passing. His glance lingered on the lady.

"Good-looking woman," he said.

"Very. And the right sort too, I should think. He appears to be a good deal older than she. . . . The parson is Canon Byway. I don't much fancy his wife. Rather a vinegary aspect."

"If there's scandal on board this ship, that lady will smell it," said Mr. Amersham.

"You can cut out the 'if,'" the purser smiled. "There's always a scandal or two on a long voyage."

"Ah, yes," said Mr. Amersham, who had not voyaged far. "And who's this rather good-looking young man?" he murmured.

"At present," answered the purser, after a necessary pause, "I don't know him. It takes a little while to identify everybody. Looks as if he'd like to escape, doesn't he?"

The allusion was to a lady to whom the young man was making polite responses. Her appearance called to mind a fading flower.

"I don't know her either," said the purser. "But

I wouldn't mind making a bet that she's bound for Colombo."

"Why Colombo?"

"That's where girls go from Australia as a last resource. It's handy and it's a good marriage market. 'No reasonable offer refused'—that's this one's label."

They stopped and faced the forecastle. Mr. Martin Sale swept by upon his third lap. He was like a rushing wind.

"I shouldn't like him to run over me," said Mr. Amersham. "It would be almost as bad as being knocked down by a motor-car."

"Juggernaut," said the purser, "was the name he got when we brought him out. He liked it."

"He would."

"Another cormorant, I think," observed the purser of a girl who flitted by with a demure stare at him. He answered Mr. Amersham's questioning look. "We call them cormorants—voracious sea-birds, you know. Ready to devour anything in trousers. That one probably has her parents with her, but you'll never see her with them except in the dining-saloon. . . . She's looking for a place to put that chair. . . . Ha! sighted. . . . No encouragement, though. Never mind; she'll barge in. Bound to be welcome. Done it. There you are!"

The girl had set her chair beside the young man's. There was just room for it.

"He's well hemmed in now," said Mr. Amersham. "Poor devil! What a thing it is to be handsome."

"She'll drive the other off. Well, better her than t'other. She's young, at any rate."

"It's sheer piracy. That young woman ought to

hang in chains. . . . There's no one, of course, in the steerage of any celebrity."

"Not as far as I know," the purser answered. "They seem to be a job lot. However, they're interesting to watch sometimes. And occasionally they're a nuisance."

"How?" Mr. Amersham keenly asked.

"Oh, you know, they're liable to get a bit above themselves. The sea air gives them an appetite, they feed like fighting-cocks; there's bottled beer and stout, as much as they can buy; they're idle; and they take no exercise. You can't be surprised. There's usually some rowdiness at night which we can't always stop—it's tact, you see, not force, that we have to rely on—but you aren't likely to be troubled by it; your cabin's far enough for'ard."

"Really?" said Mr. Amersham. "I wouldn't have thought it. They seemed to me a very quiet, orderly lot. Tame, I would even have called them."

"Oh, they're tame enough now, but they won't be so tame in a few weeks, when the sea air and so forth has got its work in." The purser grinned. "You'll see the sea air working here too. That's what we put it down to, at least. I mean the different way people behave on board a ship to what they do on land. The air seems to go to their heads. It's better than a play sometimes."

Mr. Amersham was much interested.

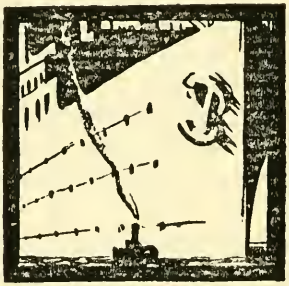
"The last three weeks are the liveliest, usually," the purser continued. "If they weren't, they'd be the longest, so it's as well they are. With the Colombo passengers and the Port Said passengers we're a well-

mixed crowd by the time we get to Marseilles. More like a Zoo than anything."

"You certainly whet my appetite," said Mr. Amersham. "I shall have a splendid time!"

"I hope so," replied the purser. "Well, now I must get back to my office. See you this evening, perhaps."

Mr. Amersham found a seat.



CHAPTER THREE

MR. FLEETWOOD MOVED IN HIS CHAIR. IT WAS A PREmonitory movement. Mrs. Fleetwood knew it and waited for him to speak.

"I think," he said, "I shall go below and see if there's a chance of getting a hand at bridge. You won't be coming down, I suppose."

"If I go below," she answered, "I make a certainty of it. I feel pretty doubtful now."

"Care for a glass of champagne?"

"It would be worth trying. Yes. It might—settle me."

"All right. I'll tell the wine-steward. Don't mind me leaving you, do you?"

"Not a bit. I'd rather be alone, in fact." She smiled at him. "I'm not in a company mood."

He left her, and presently a tall agile steward in mess uniform came along with a tray and a glass and a bottle of Moët.

"Wait a minute," said Mrs. Fleetwood, when he had filled the glass. "Two might be better than one. I'll drink this and you can fill it again."

She drank cautiously and then with more confidence.

"Anything else I can get or order for you, ma'am,"

asked the steward, when he had filled the glass a second time.

"No, thanks," Mrs. Fleetwood answered. "Unless you can ask the captain to keep the ship still."

The steward's smile had just the right degree of restraint. His tone was friendly but thoroughly respectful.

"She's a lively ship *sometimes*, ma'am," he replied. "But once you get used to her you'll hardly notice her." He skated off with his tray. One could not imagine him losing his balance in any sea.

Mrs. Fleetwood drank the second glass more slowly. She began to feel better. More settled. Sitting perfectly still, she lost that dreadful sense of dissolution which had been stealing upon her. In order not to look at the sea, dizzily climbing and falling with relentless rhythm, she gave her attention to the people. Some of them had a wary, apprehensive look : they had her sympathy. The crank in the white trousers and sweater no longer stormed at three-minute intervals by her, but others passed occasionally. Among them a young man walking alone. He walked backward and forward, not around the deck ; thus keeping to the sheltered side.

Mrs. Fleetwood covertly observed him. He had an uncommon face. It had an almost feminine delicacy, though one could not call it effeminate : it was too fine a face : it was not weak or soft. She wondered what he was. Not who he was. An artist, perhaps. Or a musician. He had thick, dark hair, sufficiently musical, but she did not think he was a musician. There was something about the musical face one could never mistake : it had soul in place of intelligence.

He glanced at her once when he was opposite her, and his eyes dilated curiously. He did not again look at her when he was near, but she caught his eyes upon her when he was a little way off. Mrs. Fleetwood had the feeling of herself being caught, and withdrew her regard hastily. Of course, there was nothing in his looking at her, nor in her looking at him ; they were both of them people who might with excuse be looked at. All the same, it was not polite to stare. Had she been staring ? Surely not.

Her husband's appearance surprised her. It surprised her in a double sense. She had not expected him to reappear so soon ; and he seemed to be, somehow, different ; older and plainer than himself. Yet it was he. It was indubitably Laurence.

" Couldn't get a game," he said. " I've made up a party for to-night, though. How are you feeling ? Better ? "

" The champagne did me good—I think," she answered doubtfully ; and suddenly gripped the frame of her chair which had begun to slide. " Good heavens, it's getting worse, isn't it ? "

" She is rolling a bit more, I believe. Sure you wouldn't like to lie down ? "

" Wait a minute."

She knew that if she went below she would be ill, immediately and violently. Her one chance was to stay on deck. She was weighing that chance.

" A cup of tea ? " said Fleetwood. " Mightn't do, perhaps, on top of the champagne. Still——"

" Don't speak to me for a minute, please. I can't talk."

Again the ship rolled deeply to leeward. She was pitching a little, too, now.

" I must go," said Mrs. Fleetwood. " Give me your arm, Larry."

She had weighed the chance. There was just a hope that she might be able to contain herself if she remained on deck, but she could not risk being sick before that young man. She did not ask herself why. She knew simply that she could not.

He had just that moment passed. She rose, leaning lightly on her husband, whose own steps were not very steady. They reached the staircase entrance and disappeared.

The young man turned about. He perceived and regretted the vacancy when he was still some distance from it.

He was Mr. Amersham's young man, and had made his escape by resigning his chair to a lady, a friend of the younger cormorant. After this he would have to be rude, he decided : it was the only way.

Fleetwood, on the arrival of the stewardess, left his wife and went to the bar for a whisky. The bar was on the upper promenade deck and overlooked the poop. He was not feeling very happy. He was never sea-sick, but the motion of the boat, if there was much of it, always affected his liver at first. The weather was dull and he disliked this blusterous wind. Moreover, this voyage was reminding him sadly of the voyage out. They were two now ; they had been three then. His work had been successful, but he wished that he had never seen New Zealand ; and he had good reason for wishing that.

In New Zealand he had lost his son and only child.

A year after their arrival the boy had been drowned in the river which Fleetwood's dam was to harness. Before this there had been many difficulties ; afterwards, as if the river god were satisfied, the work went smoothly forward.

Well, he still had Vera ; but she did not replace the boy. And he did not expect to have any more children. Vera seemed to have recovered from the loss completely, though at the time she had been more terribly distressed than he had been. But that was the way with women. They suffered, or appeared to suffer, deeply, but their sufferings soon passed. They forgot the most tragic events. Simply forget them. Of course, he might be misjudging her. What did he know of her thoughts ? She was as reticent as he. Perhaps he had taught her reticence. He perceived, with a slight jar, that her inmost life and thoughts were totally hidden from him. Was it always so with a wife ? It seemed that it ought not to be.

Presently he returned to his chair. On his way he saw, among the seated ones, a lady who sat at his table. Vera and she had exchanged some words at lunch. Seeing that he was recognised, he raised his cap, and the lady leaned forward. Her mouth formed an O ; she took pains with her enunciation, which was slow and clear.

" I'm afraid your daughter is ill," she said. " I saw you taking her down a little while ago."

" My wife ? " said Fleetwood pleasantly. " Yes. She's feeling the roll. Be better to-morrow, I hope."

He proceeded, leaving the lady to her confusion.

Her mistake had not amused him. It had been made before and at first it had pleased him to think that his

wife looked so young as to seem a mere girl. But now what occurred to him was : Do I look so old that I must be her father ? For in truth, though she looked younger than she was, there was nothing girlish about her. The actual difference between their ages was fifteen years. Vera was thirty-five : one would have said twenty-five from her appearance. Not more, but decidedly a woman, not a young girl. Her physical development was noticeable.

So he must appear about sixty, if he was not to be taken for her husband. Nice, cheerful thought !

" Unattractive man ! " was the judgment Mr. Amersham pronounced on Fleetwood as he passed him at the summons of the dressing-bell. " Cold and self-centred. Therefore, married to a young and handsome woman, *of course.*"

His bedroom steward knocked and was admitted while Mr. Amersham was dressing in his single cabin.

" What time would you like your bath in the morning, sir ? " the steward asked.

" Between seven and half-past, if I can have it then."

" All right, sir. Then I'll bring your tea at seven." Mr. Amersham's trunk was open in the middle of the floor. " Would you like me to hang up some of your things, sir ? There's drawers for the shirts and so on."

" So I see. Yes, you might take some of the things out." Mr. Amersham spoke carelessly. He was not used to being valeted, but you would not, from his manner of speaking, have known that.

" What's your name, steward ? " he inquired of the steward's assiduous back, bent over the trunk. He approved the reverent way in which his clothes were

being handled, although he was not taken in by the steward's attentions. He had made enough short sea voyages to know all about stewards.

"Breese, sir," replied the steward eagerly. "Any time you want anything and I'm not about, just send for me. . . . If I were you, sir," he confided, "I wouldn't get up for breakfast if the weather keeps like this. It won't be very nice on deck, sir, in the morning. I'll bring you your breakfast in bed—only too pleased to."

"I'll see," said Mr. Amersham, with dignified suavity.

"Very well, sir. Let me know when I bring your tea." He closed the trunk and pushed it under the bed. "Nothing more you want now, sir?"

"No, thank you, Breese."

Mr. Amersham did remember something that he wanted, or would want after dinner. He had determined to keep a diary upon this voyage and had bought a book for the purpose. He found it in the trunk.

The dinner-bell rang, and he was glad to hear it. The sea agreed with him, and he was getting used to the motion; it did not disturb his internal economy in the least.

After dinner he retired to his cabin to meditate. He lay on the couch with the new book open on his knee. At length he adjusted his glasses and entered the date. His usually flowing hand was rather cramped, but restraint was needed to keep the pen from sprawling.

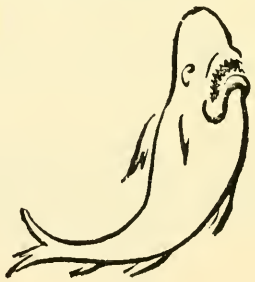
"Initial impressions," he wrote, and underlined the words, so that they appeared as a heading.

"My interest in my fellow-passengers is curiously

piqued. I mean, particularly, in regard to them as a body. Here they are, a suddenly formed community, assembled from a variety of motives ; *arbitrarily* assembled. In that respect they are quite unlike any ordinary community, which common interests gather together. The sole common interest of these people is to reach their destination. Instead of being homogeneous they are heterogeneous. Nowhere but on board a ship would they be likely to meet. Yet here they are committed to a life intensely communal. For six weeks they will be subjected to an intimacy without parallel on land ; for six weeks they will be an isolated community in a hotel which they cannot walk out of. They will have communication with the world but no contact with it, except at ports of call. For the time being, you might say, we are a microcosm. Already I have that sense of separateness, of being part of a new formation, in, but not of, the general world. We are idle, the conditions are novel ; there is a breakage of associations, of the familiar order of things. It will be most interesting to see how we behave in circumstances strange to most of us, unusual to all."

There the entry ended.

Mr. Amersham locked the book in a small suitcase and put the key in his pocket.



CHAPTER FOUR

THE BOATSWAIN'S PREDICTION WAS VERIFIED. THE first meal was the last that some of the passengers ate for a couple of days.

Mrs. Chisman was among the prostrate, and Miss Bodle kindly took upon herself to look after the children. As this was a business which did not exclusively occupy her, Mr. Chisman enjoyed much of her society. At night, when the children were in bed, they sat, wrapped in coats and rugs, at the stern.

"We might have this weather till we're out of the Bight," said Chisman, late one evening. He could not keep an accent of hopefulness out of his voice.

"Let's hope not," said Miss Bodle. "Poor Mrs. Chisman!"

"I dare say it won't hurt her. The doctors say that sea-sickness is good for people."

"Still, it can't be very nice while you've got it."

"She'll be up soon enough," said Chisman, in a low voice.

Miss Bodle was silent; but her silence seemed to stir, even to be tumultuous.

"I don't care," said Chisman, as if she had spoken. "I can't pretend—to you."

Still Miss Bodle did not speak.

"It's been a godsend having you to talk to these three days—Nellie. You'll let me call you Nellie, won't you, when we're alone?"

"I don't know," answered Miss Bodle. "I ought not to. I ought to get up and go away now, by rights."

"You wouldn't think you ought to," said Chisman, "if you could see into me. I can't talk well, so I can't show you what's there. But don't you imagine I'm trying any mean trick on you, just because I've got the chance and you're a girl. I'd cut my throat before I would. That's how I feel about it!"

He spoke with an emotion which called forth a corresponding tone in Miss Bodle's voice.

"I know you couldn't do anything mean. I know that very well. If I thought you could, I wouldn't be talking to you. But it's dreadful to hear you say things like you've said. It makes *me* feel mean."

"I said the truth when I said she'd be up soon enough—soon enough for me, anyhow. I tell you, I can't pretend with you, Nellie. And no good ever comes of pretending. You won't give me the cold shoulder after this, now, will you—because I've let you know the truth?"

There was a pause. Behind the two was a deck-house, and the stern was only indirectly lighted, so that Miss Bodle's face was not distinct to Chisman's questioning gaze. He felt rather than saw that she was trembling.

He took her hand. He could have taken it, easily, before this, for their chairs were very close together.

"Don't cry, Nellie," he exhorted her.

" I couldn't ! " she answered.

" But you are. I can see the tears. Now there's nothing to cry about."

" Couldn't give you the cold shoulder, I mean ! "

He gave the hand a squeeze. " I knew you wouldn't. I knew you'd take me the right way."

She recovered her outward composure.

" We've got to be just friends," she said. " It's no good for us to think we can be anything more."

" I s'pose not," said Chisman sadly. " We might, it there was only Ann, but with the children——"

" No, you mustn't think about it. I wouldn't let you. . . . Isn't it funny, I feel as if I'd known you for months, and it's not four days ! "

" It seems quite natural to me. Not funny at all. As if we'd been waiting to meet, and this was bound to happen."

They heard a step.

" Ten o'clock. All below, please," said the night-watchman, appearing from round the corner.

" All right," answered Chisman. " We're going now."

He stood up and pulled the girl to her feet.

" I want to kiss you," he said.

She shrank from him. " No. I'm afraid. You know we've got to be friends and nothing more."

" And you know you needn't be afraid of me. Come, I want to show you that you *can* trust me. But I won't kiss you unless you say I may."

" Then kiss me," said Nellie, in a thin voice.

He drew her to him. A sudden plunge of the ship sent them staggering against the house. Chisman braced himself there and held her closely.

" You can trust me," he repeated. " I'd rather cut my throat than do you a wrong."

" Don't talk about cutting your throat," said Nellie. " You've said that twice." She laughed, to ease the strain.

" Now I s'pose we must say good night. Ah well, there's to-morrow, and lots more to-morrows. At any rate, we can see each other every day, and manage to meet at night. My wife used to go to bed early on the voyage out. The sea air makes her sleepy."

He saw her to the next deck, where they separated, after parting with due formality before three stewards who were drinking beer out of bottles. The third-class bar was underneath the poop and had closed on the stroke of ten.

The *Dido's* first port of call was Adelaide. It should have been Melbourne, but Melbourne was in the grip of a strike, and the *Dido*, having mails to take from Fremantle, could not risk a hold-up.

Before Adelaide was reached the weather had moderated, and Mrs. Chisman and other sufferers came on deck. The spell ashore restored them, but their anticipations were gloomy. For, if they had fared thus on the coast, what was to be expected now that they were to cross the Australian Bight ?

For a wonder, the Bight was calm. The sun shone, though the air was keen, and this bracing weather followed the ship to the Leeuwin, which nasty corner passed, she entered Fremantle, her last port in Australia.

Upon sailing thence Mr. Amersham wrote in his diary : " We are becoming a family."

He was partly right. A family spirit was showing itself. The atoms were amalgamating. A contrary process also was taking place. What had been a herd was now a collection of individuals. First, one had noticed individuals in the herd; then individuals where the herd had been. Some, of course, were more prominent than others, but all had personality. For instance, there was the Pig. The Pig was a steerage passenger. The title was not given to him in dishonour, but because he spent his hours on deck in a pen. He was two years old, and the pen, while incommoding his fellow-passengers, saved his parents the trouble of seeing that he did not fall overboard. They too had each a title, which they derived from him. They were the Pig's father and the Pig's mother. It was simpler to designate them thus than to learn their names.

Similarly, there was the Boatswain's Girl. This couple's romance was so public that it invited public comment. "There's always a bottle of beer in the boatswain's cabin," facetious youth would cry. "Wott-oh for the life of a sailor!"

Algy was known to all. He was a slender, fair-haired youth who had been exported to Australia for his own and his family's good. The benefit that Algy had got from his migration was not apparent, but one surmised that his family were the better for it. He was returning now to gladden their eyes, and, as he said, incidentally to raise a few hundred quid. Until he had it he would not budge from the dear old home. Algy was engaging in his frankness about his past and about his plans. One felt that if that money could possibly be scraped together, Algy's stay in the dear old home would not

be long. Excellent as diversion upon a long voyage, he was not domestically gifted.

The Pigeon was another of the prominent. He was so called because he pouted his chest and had a long body and short legs. Dressed in the purple and blue blazer which he affected as soon as the weather grew warmer, he looked uncommonly like a pigeon. He strutted, and had round, blue, pink-rimmed eyes. He was a choir-master upon a holiday. The Pigeon did not mix with Tom, Dick and Harry. He took care to know only those whom a choir-master ought to know, or might know without damage. He appointed himself the organiser of games and sports.

At the opposite end of the social scale in the third class was a lady who came to be known as the Girl without any luggage. She had *no* luggage, except a cotton dress. And a stranger fact revealed itself—or, rather, it was revealed by the lady who shared her cabin. When she took off her frock to go to bed, simultaneously she took off all the clothes she was wearing. Yes, positively ! She stood on the cabin floor with nothing on !

She presented a problem. How, having no luggage and no underclothing, had she found the money to buy a steerage ticket—a matter of nearly forty pounds ? She became a mystery. The fame of her spread to the first class, through Miss Marmion's maid, who was in the third cabin.

" Not a stitch has she got, miss, but that second frock," said the maid, a fresh-faced, personable woman not much younger than her mistress. " If I was the lady in her cabin, I wouldn't stand it. Her or me'd have to go elsewhere."

" But why, Violet ? " said Miss Marmion curiously. " Isn't she clean ? "

" Clean ? " said Violet. " It isn't decent to stand up before another woman with nothing on—and her a total stranger, too. I'm sure I don't know if she's clean or not."

" Perhaps," Miss Marmion suggested, " she belongs to that society for the abolition of clothes. If she's clean, I don't think the other lady has any right to object to her."

" Of course, miss," said Violet, who was a privileged servant, " you always do think differently from other people."

Miss Marmion accepted the criticism.

Mr. Amersham came to hear of her through the deckman, an old salt who had been relegated to the duty of attending to the games and sweeping the decks. Mr. Amersham was on friendly terms with him. Old Tulip was a spring of knowledge, constantly gushing.

He was standing with his broom one radiant morning at Mr. Amersham's favourite point of vantage, the after end of the promenade deck. There was a park bench here, and Amersham was sitting on it.

" See that one, sir," said Tulip, indicating the young woman, who was comfortably seated on the hatch, quite oblivious to attention. " She's a oner, she is. If you was to take that frock off of her, sir, she'd be as naked as the day she was born—she would ! " He spoke with the relish of the old for sweets remembered.

" Really ? " said Mr. Amersham. " That's very interesting." And he learned all that there was to be learned about the young woman.

"I know where you'd find *'er* at night," grimaced the old man, whose face was reverting to the type of his simian ancestry. "Up on the third-class boat deck."

"But I thought," said Mr. Amersham, "that passengers were not allowed on the third-class boat deck."

"Nor they are, sir; but"—he winked—"that wouldn't stop 'em. Tip the night-watchman, sir; that's all they've got to do. You'd find p'raps three or four couples up there by this time, sir."

"By this time?" said Mr. Amersham, a little puzzled.

"Getting into the warmer weather, you see, now, sir. Passengers are beginning to brighten up. Wonderful things the warm weather brings out, sir, believe me."

Mr. Amersham had already had a suspicion of a subtle change in the ship's life. People seemed to be relaxing, expanding—and brightening, as old Tulip said. There were more smiles. It reminded him of spring. And last night, taking the air on the first-class boat deck, comparatively dark and empty, he had nearly tripped over two people, half-hidden behind a boat. Two pairs of feet: he had not seen much more of them. Certainly the warm weather was bringing things out.

A passenger had joined the ship at Fremantle, who, for a while, was conspicuous—conspicuously festive. He was a tall, dark, raffish-looking Australian who went by the name of O'Malley. He was travelling third, but seemed to have plenty of money; and probably had, for he had come down from the pearling-

grounds of the North. He wore a grey drill suit, a blue shirt open at the neck, and a wideawake hat.

One morning, when the third-class bar was open, he walked in and called for a whisky. He had had whisky in him when he came aboard, and more whisky in his baggage.

" We only sell Bass and Guinness at this end of the ship," answered the barman.

" God-spare-me-days ! " O'Malley gasped. " Mean to say you don't sell whisky here ? "

" No spirits of any kind. It's the Company's rule."

O'Malley expressed his opinion of the Company. Those who heard him, some of them connoisseurs, thought it a fine effort.

" It's a new order," a bystander told him. " If I'd known, I wouldn't have travelled by this line."

" It ought to be boycotted," said another. " Fancy making a man drink nothing but English beer and stout. It ain't fit to drink in the tropics."

" I'll see the captain about it," O'Malley declared.

" It's no good," the barman advised him. " The captain can't do anything. See the purser, if you like. He'll tell you the same."

O'Malley did see the purser, who was easier to find than the captain, and he heard the same sad story. The purser was regretful, but orders were orders. O'Malley again fluently and frankly expressed his opinion of the Company and resigned himself to the inevitable and bottled beer.

Major Pageant was lounging in the doorway of the first-class bar when O'Malley, the centre of a knot of sympathisers, was holding forth on the well-deck.

O'Malley jerked a thumb at the first-class bar. "*They* can get all the whisky they want," he was saying, "and drink it in front of our noses."

"Now where have I seen that chap before?" said the major to himself.

CHAPTER FIVE

WHAT WAS MOST OBVIOUS ABOUT MAJOR PAGEANT WAS his modesty. But all brave men are modest, everybody said. Therefore the major was satisfactory. He was true to type.

The ship made him its hero but did not lionise him. You could not lionise him. He was too retiring. Even the cormorants failed to draw him out of his shell. As soon as they heard of Major Pageant, V.C., they left their first chase, but the major was harder of access. He always had a book, and he kept a sharp look-out.

As to the attempts upon him, Mr. Amersham wrote :

" I said once that young Miss Osman ought to be hung in chains, but really the manœuvres of Miss Windle are even more outrageous. I have never seen such audacity. The woman seems to be desperate. Thank Heaven I am not a young man ! Young Anthone, although he did not deserve it, has had a lucky escape. But are any of us, I wonder, safe, with such a harpy about ? The captain ought to confine her.

" As for the major, his deportment is perfect. I like his shyness. But how strange that shyness and courage should so often go together. Yet unquestionably it is so."

The one person aboard who might have said that

the major was not a case in point was none other than the major. Not that he would have said so, for it would have sounded absurd, and nobody would have believed him ; but he had good cause to be doubtful of his courage and nervous of his reputation. Indeed, his reputation weighed heavily upon him. Like great but unstable wealth, it gave him constant anxiety lest he should lose it. Willingly would he have surrendered it, had it been possible to do so without disgrace. There was the rub. A man, in the last resort, may divest himself of wealth ; he may divest himself of power ; even of celebrity ; but he cannot, without grievous personal injury, lose a reputation for courage.

Yet, aided by nature, the major's deportment was so perfect, so consonant with his accredited character, that no one would have guessed the existence of this skeleton in his cupboard.

All his life he had had to struggle against his timidity —against what was nothing less than physical cowardice. Pageant, in the privacy of his heart, was not afraid to give true names to things. What made his weakness more distressing to him was that he came of a family of soldiers. From his birth he had been destined for the Army, and he entered his father's old battalion just before the outbreak of war. The battalion was in India ; it was hurried to Egypt and took part in the first Gallipoli landing as a unit of the famous 29th Division. Pageant did not take part in the landing ; that is to say, he never set foot on the shore. He was shot in the thigh before the disembarkation, and returned to Alexandria.

He saw no more of the Gallipoli show. From Egypt, after a week or two, he was sent to England, and

rejoined his battalion in France, where he took command of a company.

The battalion was technically resting, and it was some time before Pageant saw the front trenches. He hoped for the best, but feared. He had been in an awful funk on the deck of that transport, and no man was ever more thankful for a wound than he was then. He displayed an exemplary cheerfulness under the pain of it, so that doctors and patients admired him. But now, Pageant felt, he was in for it. He could not expect to be wounded again so quickly ; he had a good chance of being killed.

That he didn't fear so much as he feared himself.

When at last they arrived in the line his fears were realised. He found that he was greatly afraid. Others did not appear to be so, and neither did he ; but others, he guessed, were not feeling afraid. The sector was comparatively quiet, but this merely gave him time for introspection. He was beset by an icy dread that in some test his self-command would fail him. The dread took possession of him ; daily and nightly it sat upon him. Yet outwardly he was tranquil. From his boyhood, shame had schooled him to mask his disgraceful qualms.

Then the test came. Pageant's company and another were hastily moved to a position where a sharp attack was in progress. He found a German machine-gun on his front. That machine-gun threatened to wipe his company out. . . .

Pageant had rushed at the machine-gun as a dog, maddened by fear, might rush at an elephant. He had no thought of the danger ; it was an act of sheer panic. The sight of him seemed to paralyse the gunners and

everyone else in the German trench. Perhaps they didn't believe that he was flesh and blood, and certainly the apparition of him must have been rather incredible. When he reached them they simply downed tools and surrendered. There were eighteen of them ; not a dozen, as the purser had said.

The capture of this trench changed the whole situation, and the Germans were driven back with heavy loss. Pageant was again wounded—in the arm, this time—and was never again, till after the War, with his battalion. His V.C. was a foregone conclusion. In addition to it he received his majority and a safe post on the Staff.

All fronts had been rather sluggish when his heroic act was performed, and in consequence it was given tremendous publicity. Journalists and even politicians delighted to honour him, and Major Pageant, V.C., became a star. His singular name had helped to keep him in remembrance. Hardly anyone had ever heard of a Pageant before, for, stout soldiers though the Pageants were, he, by the irony of fate, alone of them had distinguished himself. And what a name for a hero of the spectacular sort ! It flared at you in colours ; you couldn't forget it.

Pageant was glad and he was sorry when he received his Staff appointment. It relieved him of great anxiety ; at the same time he was not quite satisfied with the result of the test. He felt that he had not failed, although his conscience could not admit that he had succeeded. No doubt he had acted in panic ; still, he had acted ; and he had a sneaking wish for another chance. He had at any rate up to that moment controlled his fears. Secretly he had always

cherished the hope that he might prove superior to the cowardice that he knew was in him. But without the opportunity he could not. All the same, it was too awful to think that as a V.C. he might show funk, so he did not ask to be returned to his regiment.

Never in his life had he been really tested. Burglars, runaway horses, all the common opportunities for showing the stuff of manliness had avoided him. Sometimes, again, he was sorry, sometimes he was glad. He did not seek opportunities ; he dared not.

After the War he had left the Army and travelled, and had spent some entertaining but unadventurous years in the South Seas. Lately his father had died, and at present he was on his way home to assume the family inheritance.

He had tried to drop his rank after leaving the Army and to become plain Mr. Pageant : if he could have dropped it he might have dropped the cursed appendage. But he found that to be impossible. No one would allow him to be anything but Major Pageant, V.C. ; and being a Regular officer on the Reserve, he could not demand the civilian address. He had to go about the world branded. A special exhibit.

As he stood in the doorway of the bar, after asking himself that question about O'Malley, and finding (he did not give the matter much thought) no answer to it, two young men approached him. One was a Rhodes scholar proceeding to Oxford ; the other an Australian subaltern who was on his way to England upon exchange. Pageant knew and smarted under the knowledge that both these lads revered him. He heard it in their voices, saw it in their eyes. And yet neither of them, he was confident, knew the meaning of fear.

" We've been holding an informal meeting in the smoking-room, some of us, and we want you to be president of the sports committee, major," said the young soldier.

" But why ? " said Pageant. " I'm not much of a sportsman. Swift would make a better president than I should." Swift was the Rhodes scholar.

" I wouldn't dream of being president," answered Swift quickly. " I'm junior to everybody."

" Well, am I senior to everybody ? " Pageant asked.

" No," replied Swift. " No. Of course not. But, you know, you're——"

" You're the right man for president," put in the other. " You can't get away from that, major. When the matter was raised there wasn't any question about it."

There wouldn't be, of course, Pageant lamented. He couldn't refuse—how could he, without seeming churlish ? One couldn't fairly call this lionising. He had been offered what was considered to be his due, and it would be uncivil not to take it.

" All right," he said. " I'm honoured." He saw Swift wince. Good Heavens, the poor lad thought he was being ironical ! " I still think," he added, " that Swift would have made a better president, but if you're determined on me, I'll do my best for you. When do you want me ? "

" We've called another meeting for half-past two, in the smoking-room," replied the subaltern. " Will that suit you, sir ? "

" Any time would suit me. Half-past two, then. Right, I'll be there. Have a drink ? "

They would, and went inside. To have a drink

with Pageant was an honour which neither of them had had before. Standing at the bar with their cocktails, they felt as if they were hobnobbing with a demigod. The War was a classic tradition to them.

"You hollow sham, you ass in a lion's skin," Pageant was saying to himself as he parted from them on the promenade deck.

Mr. Amersham was sitting on his favourite seat. With him was Oswald Straker.

"You don't look very happy, major," said the novelist. "Come and tell us your troubles."

Pageant said that he had not any serious troubles. He had to be president of the sports committee, that was all. It was rather a bore.

"The price of fame," said Straker. "We all have to pay it. I have to give a lecture one evening, and Sale, I believe, is another victim."

"And Miss Marmion, too, I suppose," said Mr. Amersham.

"Well, Miss Marmion, you see, has retired—definitely and for the last time. She's not on the active list, so to speak. She can decline to oblige. And she does, I may tell you—very gracefully."

Pageant moved off, saying that he was going to see what the ship's run had been.

"I don't think," said Straker, "that I ever met a man whose honours seemed to sit more heavily on him. And yet I don't think it's a pose. Though it may be, of course. We have a talent for masking our true selves, you know. The thing is done sometimes unconsciously, more often consciously; and the instinct of it is defensive. To know a man is to have him at our mercy—or would be, if we ever knew one.

Only the thoughtless imagine that they know people. I can create human beings in my own image and likeness, but human beings in the flesh are an endless mystery to me."

Mr. Amersham answered vaguely. His attention was divided. Straker had an idea that it was, but he did not mind : he liked to hear himself talk. Part of Mr. Amersham's attention was on Miss Marmion, who was seated by the rail, a little way off. Her chair was solitary. Passengers usually sat on the inside. She was dressed in the black silk which was her regular wear, and had on a wide-brimmed hat of a fashion seldom seen. It was trimmed and entirely covered with white silk and had the appearance of a silver halo. Her skirts were long and full. The impression she produced was of an embodiment of the flower of the Victorian era : a being, nobly old, who had come down unwithered from a great past. She gave distinction to the ship by her presence alone. She was not talkative ; her voice was seldom heard : she talked to her maid and to Straker and to few others.

" Isn't she fine ? " said Mr. Amersham. " So natural. So—so unexpected." His admiration for her was still fresh.

" The perfect actress," replied the novelist. As the purser had remarked, Mr. Straker was not, in a way, unlike her, with his white hair and his youthful face and figure.

" The perfect actress ? " repeated Mr. Amersham. " Yes, of course, but I wasn't quite meaning that." Quite the reverse, in fact. But what *did* Straker mean ? " Surely—surely, you don't mean that she's acting, do you ? "

" Why, to be sure she is ! " Straker beamed on his companion. " Hilda Marmion couldn't help acting—always with supreme art. Just as Sale can't help acting—always crudely. Hilda Marmion is acting the part proper to her years, my dear fellow ; proper to her renown, in accord with the age of which she was an ornament. She has studied it, as she has studied all her parts. It's a treat to see her in it."

Mr. Amersham was too dumbfounded to answer.

CHAPTER SIX

ON THE STARBOARD SIDE OF THE PROMENADE DECK WAS a seat similarly placed to Mr. Amersham's. Here at times Vera Fleetwood sat. She was not a gregarious woman, nor did she care much for feminine company. To sit among the crowd, alone, was to invite advances which were not easily repelled. And her husband's bridge took him from her regularly and frequently.

The importunities of an old lady—old ladies had a way of fastening on her : her health and magnificent physique may have been the attraction—the importunities of an old lady, I was saying, had driven her to cast about for a refuge. She had noted this seat : there were no chairs near it ; and most people who had chairs would not resign them to sit on a wooden bench. When she was again left alone she settled herself upon it.

It was afternoon. Bridge occupied most of Fleetwood's afternoons and evenings. Mrs. Fleetwood had a book with her, partly for reading, and partly, like the major, for defensive purposes.

Along the deck, also with a book, had come strolling the young man whose face had interested her. Up to the present she had not spoken to him. The *Dido* then

was crossing the Bight, and Mrs. Fleetwood was not long off the sick-list.

She saw him coming and resumed her reading. He strolled back and forth, back and forth, turning when he was within a few feet of her, and finally, when he was about to turn, she looked up. Not to have done so, sooner or later, would have been almost rude.

He stood. He seemed to be in doubt ; and Vera smiled.

" May I sit down ? " he said.

" Certainly," she answered. " I couldn't possibly claim the whole of this seat."

He sat down. " I know what it is to be pestered. People think that because they're on board a ship they can thrust their company on anybody. That's even less justifiable on a ship than it would be on land, because here you can't get away from people. So I must ask you not to suffer me out of mere politeness."

" I shall order you off the moment you start to bore me," she replied.

" That's right," he said. " Please do. You've set my mind at rest." And it did seem, from his tone, as if his mind were eased.

Now, it is not to be imagined that on a mail-steamer such a meeting in such a spot could have passed unobserved. Vera's occupation of the seat was in itself noticeable, and several people wondered why she had gone there. It seemed so strange to wish to sit all by oneself, on a hard bench, and so very close to the steerage, too. A rather odd woman, this lady whose husband was so often not to be seen. Unsociable, you know. Funny. And such a conspicuous position she

had chosen to take up. As if she *wanted* people to look at her.

They watched. They observed the young man strolling back and forth. They watched more keenly, awaiting developments.

"How barefaced!" one lady breathed to another when the expected had happened. "As if she thought she was invisible, or people couldn't put two and two together! That woman's dangerous, my dear."

"I always say," said Mrs. Byway, the canon's wife, "that there's something wrong with a woman who avoids other women, as if they weren't good enough for her." Mrs. Byway always did say that, and similar things.

Vera learned that the young man's name was Anthone. He had been on a tour of the East and had come through the Dutch East Indies to Australia. He did not appear at first to have any occupation. Then she learned that he wrote.

"For the papers?" she inquired.

"I write sometimes for the papers," he replied. "And I've written a book or two."

"Oh, really?" said Vera, alert to discover what precisely he was.

"I seldom allude to the fact," he laughed, "because if you say you've written a book, people wonder how it is they haven't heard of you. I wrote a novel that failed, and I've also published a small volume of verse that didn't attract much attention."

So he was a poet. If poets were not so rare, she might have guessed that he was a poet. She took fresh stock of him; then she had an inspiration.

" Why," she said—" why, I believe——"

" Don't say," he said, " that you've read it."

" No," she confessed, " but I'm certain I've read *of* it. I can't remember the title, but I remember your name now. I saw it reviewed. It had an awfully good review in the—*Sydney Bulletin.*"

" Did it ? " said Anthone, not concealing his pleasure. " Well, I'm glad to hear that. The *Sydney Bulletin* is sometimes sounder in its literary reviews than many of our English heavy-weights." He was unaware of it, but this was a new opinion of his. Had he been told that the review was a bad one, he might have said : " Ah well, these Colonial papers, you know. . . ."

" A first-rate review it was," said Vera, who had never as a matter of fact seen Anthone's name in print. " I nearly bought the book—I wish I had," she went on. " How very interesting ! "

" I have a copy with me. I'll lend it to you, if you like," he said.

" You must," said Vera. " I get so tired of novels."

This conversation had occurred on the day after they had left Fremantle. Every afternoon they sat on the same seat, for an hour or an hour and a half : the time was lengthening. In the evenings also they were to be seen there, or pacing the deck, or standing together by the ship's side. They became a fruitful topic, the solace of dull hours.

Fleetwood had been introduced to Anthone. Sometimes, if Fleetwood came up from his bridge before dinner, the three would sit on the bench. This provided another topic.

On the afternoon of Pageant's election to the

presidency of the first-class passengers' sports committee, Vera and Anthone were sitting here. Vera had spoken of Miss Marmion, whom she admired almost as warmly as Mr. Amersham did. In type they were very dissimilar. Vera was dark; Miss Marmion's hair had been golden once. The actress had always been slight of figure: Vera was classically formed; deep-bosomed, sumptuous, perfectly proportioned. The *kind* of woman, Mrs. Byway said, who was always doubtful. Nature had been skimpy with Mrs. Byway.

"What a life she has had, apart from her career!" said Vera. "Two husbands, and heaven knows how many lovers. And she doesn't show a mark of it!"

"I don't think that's so very wonderful," said Anthone slowly, "if you mean that she ought to be looking used-up and haggard."

"But don't you think that a life like hers should leave its marks?"

"Depends on what you call marks. Not indentations, necessarily. Hilda Marmion's life off the stage, one gathers, was well filled. According to story, she had a succession of lovers for many years; but I should have thought that love ought to keep a woman young. It's the woman who has never had a lover who withers early. Of course, we know that there's love and there's the other thing—the devil's imitation of love. But I should say that the more we love the younger we keep, and the quickest way to grow old is to be without love. Certainly, I can't speak from experience, but one sees enough examples of that."

Fleetwood appeared at this moment, sauntering towards them.

"You've finished early, haven't you?" said Anthone.

"Yes," said Fleetwood, and sat down beside his wife. "Massey was taken ill. Nothing serious, I think. But it stopped play. I suppose you wouldn't care to make a fourth to-night?"

"I would with pleasure," answered Anthone, "if I could play bridge. But I never played bridge in my life. I'm not a card-player." He seemed concerned that he could not oblige.

"Never mind," said Fleetwood. "I only thought you might possibly like a game. Massey may be all right to-morrow."

"How inconsiderate of him," said Vera, "to be taken ill."

The men laughed politely.

"Poor Larry!" she went on. "What *would* you do if there were no bridge in the world?"

"Play whist," he replied promptly.

"The world is full of substitutes," said Anthone. "If you lose a thing, you can always replace it."

"I don't know," said Vera. "Not always."

"No," Fleetwood agreed, with a touch of gravity. "Not always."

"My inexperience," said Anthone. "I've no doubt you're right."

There was a moment's pause.

"We lost our son, you know," said Vera impulsively.

"I had no idea. I'm sorry. I spoke like a fool. . . . I think I'll take a walk on the boat deck." Anthone rose and looked at the sea, a milky blue, still and wide as a desert and dimly gleaming. "What a picture!" he said, and left them.

" Suppose *we* take a walk," said Vera. " This seat has a way of growing hard."

" You use it rather much, don't you ? " said Fleetwood lightly, and they started to walk forward.

" It's very useful, you see. One escapes from all the bores there."

They said nothing for a minute or two. Then Vera asked what was the matter with Massey. Gastric trouble, Fleetwood thought. Probably he'd been eating and drinking rather too much. People did eat and drink too much at sea. A particularly silly thing to do when you were running up to the tropics. Vera named two possible substitutes for Massey ; men who looked like occasional bridge-players. You could nearly tell a bridge-player by his appearance, she added. She would have known that Anthone didn't play.

" I thought it civil to ask him," Fleetwood said.

" Yes, I understand," said Vera ; though what she understood she would have been perplexed to say.

A steward came along with afternoon tea. They sat in their chairs and Vera took a cup. Fleetwood declined one. He was going to be careful what he ate and drank : he might have a whisky presently. . . . They talked on, intermittently, easily and carelessly. People listened to them. Curious couple.

Vera, after her first meeting with Anthone, had had some hesitations. It was open to her either to encourage him or not to do so. If she encouraged him (it was her own word) she would have his company daily ; he would devote himself to her and to nobody else. Without flattering herself, that was predictable. He would become an attachment.

Two considerations had decided her : her liking for Anthone, and a feeling that she was being somewhat neglected. In public, that was to say, for she knew that the neglect was more apparent than real. She did not wish to claim Larry's constant companionship. Idleness was very irksome to him, and bridge was his one recreation. She had never tried to tie him to her apron-strings, to make a woman's man of him. Nevertheless, in this place it looked odd for him to be so often absent from her. She thought that he might have perceived that. It was not pleasant, having a husband, to be left alone so much among a crowd ; and it would do Larry no harm to let him know that there might be danger in leaving her. He seemed to be taking a little too much for granted, and no doubt the best of husbands needed a reminder at times.

She was fond enough of Larry. They had never quarrelled ; neither of them was of a stormy nature. She believed that she had been as happy with him as she could have been with any man. There was something " very genuine," as she called it, about him. He was reliable, stable, a rock in life. He had never deeply stirred her, but rocks don't stir ; their stability is their virtue. He was prose, but he was good prose, sound prose. . . . Anthone, on the other hand, was poetry. That was the difference between them. The one could not be the other. Rather stupid, that : an example of life's limitations. Sixpence had to be sixpence ; it couldn't be the moon too. In Heaven, perhaps, the moon would be the moon *and* sixpence.

She had lived a very quiet life with Fleetwood, and, having known no other, had been contented with it, or as contented as a person may be, who is not a fool.

She was country-bred, the daughter of a parson. Work had taken Fleetwood to the neighbourhood of her home and thus they had met. He had not been demonstrative in his love-making, but she realised that he was a shy man. There was more in him than came to the surface. She could not tell how much. Marriage did not greatly enlighten her, for within his increased range of action he remained shy. She felt at times that there was something missing. It was not that he seemed to her old. Until that afternoon when he had surprised her, she had not thought of him as old.

The child had partly quelled that sense of something missing. She hardly ever spoke of the boy now, because she knew that Larry felt the loss keenly, and it was not good to remind him of it. She had mentioned it to Anthone because Larry's words, gravely chiming with her own allusion to it, had touched her to quick sympathy.

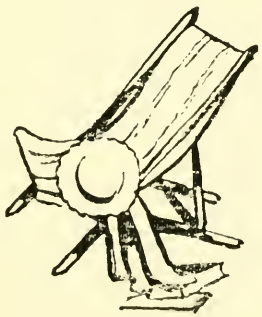
His attitude, in regard to Anthone, had begun to puzzle her. She had half expected remonstrances from him, warnings. In that event she would have said : " Well, give me more of your time." Then, had he dropped his bridge in the afternoons, she would have dropped Anthone ; or at least she would have seen considerably less of him. But Larry, after his look of faint surprise on first finding them in company, had appeared not to be concerned with the matter. He had asked her about Anthone—who he was, what he was, and so forth—but without displaying the least disquiet or care. He was seemingly indifferent to her association with Anthone. She could almost have fancied that he welcomed it as taking her off his hands. But she did not quite fancy that. All the same, this

tacit approval! It was disappointing. It showed a confidence flattering to her discretion, it was true, but not to her physical attractions. And it was hardly decent or natural for a man to be unconcerned when his wife was constantly in the company of another and —it was not to be forgotten—younger man.

Nor was it as if the like had ever occurred before and passed off without accident Never, since she had been married, had she spent an hour in the sole company of another man. The glaring novelty alone of her behaviour should have disturbed Larry.

Mr. Amersham made the following entry :

" My first impression of Fleetwood was not a pleasing one. He appears now in an even less pleasing light. By his inattention to his wife he is literally driving her into the arms of Anthone. I said he was cold and self-centred, and that opinion is confirmed. But one might almost imagine that he was something worse."



CHAPTER SEVEN

MR. AMERSHAM HAD SAID : " WE ARE A FAMILY." HE had in his mind perhaps the first-class passengers. Speaking of all the passengers, it would have been nearer the truth to have said : " We are two families, neighbours whom fate has cast together in an unpeopled wild."

They were neighbours who were not on calling or even on speaking terms, although they lived cheek by jowl and had little privacy from each other.

They were, however, mutually curious, and individual members of each family became known by sight on the other side. By name or by nickname too, in many cases. The curiosity of the steerage had a tinge of hostility in it ; that of the saloon was supercilious or patronising.

But between the two a kind of link existed, in the person of Martin Sale.

The third-class liked him because he amused them, and they greeted his pedestrian performances with good-natured though derisive cheers. These Mr. Sale invariably acknowledged with that spacious sweep of his hand.

" Poor fellow," Mr. Amersham would say. " I suppose applause of any kind is grateful to him. ' The

bird ' is no doubt what he often gets. But really, what won't some men do to attract attention ! I believe he'd stand on his head if he couldn't get people to notice him by any other means."

Others thought so, and there were some who considered that the actor was lowering the prestige of their class by making himself a laughing-stock of the third. Surely, now that they were in the tropics the fellow might stop his nonsense. The way he poured with sweat was rather disgusting, and it made one hot to look at him.

As to " stopping his nonsense," Martin Sale had directly contrary views about that. He hoped much from the tropics ; and as the sweat poured from him he exulted ; he increased his pace, he tore, and the cheers of the gallery rose.

Having disappeared one morning amid a storm of applause and bathed and re-attired himself, he looked surreptitiously round as he was passing the barber's shop. In an alcove outside it was a weighing-machine. There was no one about, and he quickly stepped on it. . . .

Two years ago Martin Sale had looked at himself in a shop window and had a nasty sensation. He then entered the nearest tube station and stepped on a weighing-machine. Dissatisfied with its verdict, he tried another. It registered the same, within half a pound.

He went to a doctor.

" More exercise is what you want," said the doctor. " Don't try any of those anti-fat preparations. They may reduce your weight, but they'll lower your vitality and may have a serious effect on your health. Sharp walking exercise will be the best thing for you.

Walk for a couple of hours every day, and gradually increase your pace. Eat moderately. Drink moderately."

The patient obeyed the instructions. He had been obeying them ever since. He had lost a little, gained a little, lost a little, gained a little more ; throughout it had been a ding-dong fight ; *but it was going against him.* At the end of the first year he was five pounds heavier ; at the end of the second year he had put on twelve pounds. Nobody knew ; he was unmarried and could keep the awful secret.

He played juvenile leads and smart young men about town ; apart from these rôles he was a general utility man, and acted usually in stock companies. He had something like a name for his juvenile parts ; otherwise he was not of much account. He was a recognised failure in low comedy.

Fat spelled ruin to him. Nothing short of ruin. Never had there been a day when fat was a greater handicap to an actor, since fat was out of fashion to-day. You could be as thin as a lath, but you mustn't be more than comfortably covered, and even to be so was a disadvantage. Skeleton figures were the most popular. As for a fat juvenile lead, why he wouldn't get an engagement from year's end to year's end. Falstaff was about the only part for a fat man now, and one couldn't expect to live by playing Falstaff, not even if he were a Benson.

Until his last trip to Australia his slight increase of girth had escaped remark. The man who had engaged him there was acquainted with him but had not seen him for some years. He had toured with Sale in days gone by.

"Hullo," he had said with a lift of his eyebrows, "you're—filling out, aren't you, laddie?"

A kindly euphemism, but the expression, to Sale's ears, was like a pronouncement of doom.

He walked harder and harder, and it seemed to him at last that he was holding the foe in check.

He had feared the return voyage. In periods of idleness he was apt to put on flesh, and he knew that the sea agreed with him only too well. He had taken measures accordingly.

Aboard ship he weighed himself when no one was looking. He had gained three-quarters of a pound in the colder weather. Stepping on the machine to-day, he had expected to see it mark a reduction. Instead of that, it registered an increase of a pound!

He stared at it, shocked, hardly believing, and staggered away to his cabin. After all his exertions, all the sweat he had lost! What was it—the sea air? He was half inclined to give up the struggle.

But Sale was a game man. When the stunning effect of the blow had passed he went on deck again; in appearance unembarrassed, his jaunty self once more.

"Well, Mr. Sale," said Miss Windle, accidentally meeting him, "do you feel the better for your walk?"

"Pounds better," answered Sale in his buoyant, carrying voice. "Not that I felt ill before. But I feel in the acme of condition after my exercise. I couldn't live without it now."

"It does seem to agree with you," declared Miss Windle. "You look the picture of health."

Sale's face indeed shone. A mask, as Straker would

have said. And Sale had a widowed mother to support, which was why he had never married.

Miss Windle let him go. She had no designs upon him. She regarded him as an impregnable egoist.

Miss Windle too had her troubles. Up to the present this voyage had been a disappointment to her. An optimist, she had expected much from it. For fifteen years she had cherished a legitimate desire to obtain a husband. Her father was a squatter, well-to-do ; but her home was in the wide spaces of the West, and her opportunities had been limited. Optimist though she was, she was beginning to realise that she was near the end of her tether. And Miss Windle was warm-hearted. It chilled and frightened her to think that she might go to the grave unmated, without having fulfilled what she secretly knew to be her purpose in life.

But she, like Sale, had fortitude. If failure was in her lexicon, she had not spelled it yet. She could weep—and she did weep in her cabin—but she could dry her eyes and powder her nose and set out on a new enterprise. She had one in her head at this moment.

> " In the spring a brighter iris
> gleams upon the burnished dove ;
> In the spring the young man's fancy
> lightly turns to thoughts of love."

It was Straker who made the quotation. He was looking down on the well-deck, and the purser and Mr. Amersham were with him.

" You might almost fancy," Straker continued, " that he was gleaming with a brighter iris. And,

figuratively speaking, I suppose we may call this spring."

"You may," said the purser. "Summer is ahead of us. This is one of the first indications of it."

The object of their discreetly veiled attention was the choir-master, known generally as the Pigeon. It may have been the effect of the tropical light, but his purple and blue blazer did indeed appear more brilliant than it had been. His face was a splendid pink, and his eyes bulged a little.

He had assisted to furnish an item of scandal, the first that could be called authentic, and it had a piquancy. His cabin mate had found him in their cabin with the Girl Without Any Luggage. A crotchety man, he had objected, and made a complaint to the purser.

Repelling the insinuation against his character, the choir-master had protested that he was interested in the lady's spiritual welfare only. This, for some reason, had caused amusement. The lady had nothing to say. She was exasperatingly dumb on all subjects.

"It's singular," said the purser, "that his name should be Dove."

"Is it really?" said Straker.

"Why, I thought you knew, when you made that little quotation. . . . Yes, his name's Dove, and it appears that they called him the Pigeon without knowing what his name was."

"Well, well! It's very seldom one meets a man who has an appropriate name. . . . I used to take a lot of trouble with my names once," Straker recalled. "I don't now. I came to the conclusion that to make names fit people was waste of time and bad art. Now

when I want names for a novel I take a walk in a suburb and collect a batch from the houses. Some of them are rather odd, but that's all the better; it saves one from libel actions. Names like Maisonette and Evoh Ruo are no good, of course, but two out of three are usable, and quite as likely as the names you meet in real life. Shakespeare was right when he said there was nothing in a name. Use is all that makes a name seem the right name—unless, of course, it's an obviously appropriate name like that little man's. If Shakespeare had been named Simpkins we should revere that name as much as we revere Shakespeare's, instead of associating it, as we do, with stage curates and the comic papers."

"I dare say we should. Nothing seems quite right till use has made it so," the purser remarked, and went about his business.

A steward, carrying a pile of linen, descended from the poop.

"There's Breese, with our laundry," observed Mr. Amersham. He and Straker had adjoining cabins, and Breese served them both. They now sat at the same table. "I wonder if he told you that he'd taken the liberty of mentioning to the laundress that you were a rather particular gentleman about the way your linen was got up."

"Oh, yes," Straker smiled. "I suppose he tells everyone that."

"His attentions begin to weary me," said Mr. Amersham. "His motives are really too palpable. But all stewards are alike. Servile, venal, false—unmanly, somehow. I know no baser human type."

"Well, now," the novelist dissented mildly, "I

think you condemn too sweepingly. I'm very doubtful if any class of man should be condemned. My opinion is that no trade or calling has a monopoly of good or evil, or even a large preponderance of it. I believe there are bad bishops and good burglars—possibly plenty of them. No, I shouldn't like to brand all stewards as worthless, even though they are servile and venal. All we see of them is their occupational side."

"Perhaps I'm uncharitable," said Mr. Amersham, though he did not think that he was. "I say, just look at that couple."

"Summer has come, I think," Straker replied.

Almost directly below them was a pair of lovers. From their fellow steerage passengers they were very imperfectly screened by a canvas ventilator which had been let down into the hold, and they appeared to be under the impression either that they were invisible or that they were alone on deck.

"What is remarkable to me," said Mr. Amersham, "is the rapidity with which these affairs mature. I'm not thinking of this one only. It's the same with all that I've noticed."

"Their course is short in proportion, you see," Straker answered. "On a sea voyage you have a chapter of life condensed. If these affairs didn't mature quickly they'd never mature at all in the time. Everything has to be speeded up to the time limit—or rather it speeds itself up automatically. How long, I wonder, does a May-fly take over his wooing? It's the same—d'you see? Life will always adjust itself to the time limit. Even the short Atlantic passage has its crop of fully formed love-affairs."

An awning covered the well-deck. From the open door of the bar at the farther end of it came the clink of bottles and glasses. A low hum of talk rose from the deck, and was interspersed with louder remarks. The hatch, being open to admit the ventilator, had been partly roped off. Children played, but otherwise there was little movement among the people who for the most part lolled in deck-chairs or sat or sprawled on the unroped portion of the hatch. Still though it was, one detected in it the strong pulsation of life. The door of the boatswain's cabin was open ; no one was visible through it, but the port-hole framed for a moment a girl's head and neck.

The poop formed a sort of gallery to this scene. Chairs were ranged along its front, and near the middle sat Mr. and Mrs. Chisman. There were empty chairs on each side of them.

Mrs. Chisman was reading. Her book absorbed her. Chisman was looking down at the hatch. On it sat Nellie Bodle, with the Chisman children frisking at her knees.

She looked up and her eyes met Chisman's as if a string had drawn them. She gave him the ghost of a smile and turned her head away.

Mrs. Chisman closed her book. It was *The Blue Lagoon.*

CHAPTER EIGHT

"I WISH IT WAS DINNER-TIME," SAID MRS. CHISMAN; "and when it comes," she added, "I suppose we'll be wishing there was something to eat."

"Well, you generally do," replied Chisman, "though I must say you don't eat badly, Ann."

"D'you want me to starve?" she snapped.

"Only pulling your leg, you know very well," he answered patiently.

"I wish to goodness," said Mrs. Chisman, "we were off this boat. I'm sick of it, and sick of the people."

"Got to stick it."

"Oh, that's all right for you to talk. You'd be contented anywhere, I do believe."

"And you'd never be contented anywhere," he said, drawn to retort. "That's you, Ann. That's been you ever since I've known you. When you're off this boat you'll be wishing you were back on it again or——" He pulled up. He hated bickering.

"Yes, go on," said Ann, who loved it. "Wishing I was back in Australia, you were going to say. No, I *don't* think. I've had enough of Australia—and Australians."

Chisman was silent.

" And Australians," she repeated. Chisman liked Australians, but this time he was not to be drawn. It needed some restraint, however, not to say : " Well, there's an Australian who's been your nursemaid from the start of this voyage."

" Finished your book ? " he said.

" Yes," she replied shortly.

" The library will be open if you want to change it."

" It ought to be. I'm just thinking whether I'll go or not. That library steward comes to change the books when he feels inclined."

" He's always there now," said Chisman.

" I'm tired. This weather makes me feel that heavy I can hardly move about. You go, Ern, and get me something good." Her voice was almost sweet.

" I'll go," he said, without moving. " But if I do, I'm bound to get you the wrong book. And then you'll have nothing to read all the afternoon."

" Of, of course," she tartly rejoined. " You'll never do the smallest thing I ask you. It wouldn't be you if you did, would it ? "

Chisman got up and put out his hand for the book. She drew it back from him. " Oh, don't bother. I'll go myself."

" I'll go if you're tired," said Chisman. " I dare say I can find you something."

" Sit down," she said. " Sit down, for goodness' sake. People are looking at you I'm going myself in a minute. I know the sort of book *you*'d pick for me."

Chisman sat down, and his wife, having summoned her energies, raised herself to her feet. She stood and surveyed the well-deck.

" I don't see the children—nor Miss Bodle," she said.

" I expect she's taken them aft."

" Well, she might bring 'em up here a bit oftener. Anyone might think they belonged to her."

" They're safe with her," said Chisman, speaking to conceal his thoughts. Most of his conversation with his wife was directed to this end.

" Safe. I dessay. They ought to be. But you'd think it'd strike her that their mother might want to see a bit more o' them. . . . There's that Pigeon walking about as bold as brass. The front he's got ! . . . And, my word, those two on the other side of the hatch—it's disgraceful, Ern ! " said Mrs. Chisman, with an indignant face. " The captain ought to be spoken to. I never saw such carryings-on on a ship in broad daylight."

" It's the same on every ship, I s'pose," said Chisman. " You saw much the same on the way out."

" You think it's all right, do you ? "

" I don't think anything about it. It doesn't bother me."

" There's not much that does bother you," said Mrs. Chisman, and with this criticism, which seemed to be both disparaging and envious, she walked away on deliberate feet.

Chisman sighed. If only she would never come back. Just disappear as people do in dreams. Be not. It was odd that her temper should always be worst when he had a chance or was doing his best to enjoy himself. It appeared to irritate her to see him happy.

Not that he had been entirely happy lately, of course ; his happiness had been comparative. But he was having a glorious holiday from his usual condition of dull endurance, as unbrokenly dun as an English

November day. He was like a child on a holiday ; he was firmly shutting his eyes to the inevitable end of it. He glimpsed it sometimes, but when he did he refused to realise it.

Many things contributed to keep him in that state of spiritual lightness in which illusions flourish. He was in good health ; he was enjoying the warmth and the sunshine ; the very progress of the ship had something dream-like in it. They had left Australia in the winter ; and he had had much worrying business before he had got away. He had been further depressed by the thought that he was leaving for ever a good country. And hardly had he started on the voyage than Heaven had received him. His feet remained on the earth for Ann to trample on, but his head was up among the stars.

When Ann had gone he wrapped himself in a kind of sensuous trance. He had no thought of looking for Nellie, of having a word with her ; he would see her and touch her to-night. The air was languorous, voluptuous ; there was no wind. The sky was cloudless, the sea as smooth as a boy's brow. Day had followed day of this magic weather in which the ship, by magic, seemed to be caught, to move without progressing. It was easy to imagine that she was enchanted, that she would never leave this arc of impossibly perfect ocean, where nothing changed but the temperature, which rose ever a little day by day. The idea that she was proceeding to any destination appeared fantastic ; she was simply making a holiday for tired souls.

There was little to clash with this conception. Not even the sailors had any visible business save to

minister to the comfort of the passengers. Daily they washed the decks and rigged the awning ; aft and amidships at any rate they did no manner of other work. The ship kept her unchanging position in the centre of that magic circle of ocean, and the captain's only desire seemed to be to keep her there.

Nearly all the passengers had surrendered to the lulling, otiose influences. They luxuriated ; they were without care. Even the Pig in his pen sat in silent contentment, meditating on the mystery of toe-nails. There was little sound ; at times there was an unreal silence, as if all this, the ship and the people and the sea, were nothing but a vision. The throb of an engine in a deck-house, aft of where Chisman sat, did not destroy the fancy. He heard it all day long, from eight o'clock till five, and it was part of the abnormal world he was in. Moreover, the engine did nothing to help the ship along ; it had its slaves, but they, like the sailors, were ministers to the passengers' convenience. They were the laundresses, beautifully strong young women, in perfect physical condition from their hard work. The sweat beaded on their bare shoulders and arms ; their hair was damp, their eyes were bright, their muscles gleamed. It appeared as if they toiled that others might rest, or as if they were the motive power that kept the show in being. They were the reverse of the life of the ship, and yet in harmony with it. And they, too, had their lovers, Chisman noticed. . . .

There was dancing now in the evening, and cinema performances. The screen was rigged on the forward part of the poop, and the operator took his stand on the first-class boat deck. Hours before the show was

due to commence, third-class passengers had their seats secured below. For such of the saloon passengers who condescended to come, chairs were placed on the promenade deck. High on the boat deck, palely seen against the screen of night, appeared a row of figures, like a company of dark and brooding gods who, roaming the air, had sighted this bizarre scene in mid-ocean and settled on the ship. They were merely the sailors and firemen.

The performance ended, chairs were stowed away, and, in the steerage, bedding was brought on deck. The lower cabins were stuffy, and passengers were allowed to sleep on deck while the ship was in the warmer latitudes. The men had the well-deck to themselves ; the women and children had the poop and no man was allowed up there but the policeman, who carried an electric torch.

There was more noise then in the after part of the ship than at any time of the day. The well-deck sang, out of a full heart, and kept itself awake with bottled ale and stout. It kept the poop awake and there were altercations, in which the female tongue won upon points but was beaten in the issue. For the noise went on ; it increased ; so that the poop learned to be silent.

The policeman could do little. His position galled him. Once he had been a Metropolitan policeman, a man whose word was law. Here it was a voice crying in a wilderness. He could not blow his whistle and bring half a dozen comrades to his aid and have the roisterers locked up ; he could not, and they knew it and disregarded him. The most he could do, when persuasion had failed, was to bring his colleague, who

also was but a remonstrant tongue, and, in the last resort, the purser. The purser in his turn would expostulate, and conclude with a " Now, boys, you've had a good evening. Time you went to sleep and let others sleep."

The boys would then give him three cheers, and sing one more rattling chorus, just to show that they'd go on as long as they liked ; after which there would be silence. It was midnight ; they were sleepy ; and they would have slept before if this phantom of authority, that begged for their defiance, had not tempted them.

" There's nothing we can do more than we do," the policeman said to a passenger who complained to him. " We're a long way from the nearest police court, you've got to remember. There's only me and my mate. We can't call on the crew. They're paid to sail the ship, not to keep order in it. Of course, if there was real trouble, we'd have to call on the crew, and it'd be easy enough to make it, I can assure you. But real trouble's the last thing the captain wants. It would be a bad advertisement for the Company, and he'd get the blame for it. We just have to humour them, while the hot weather lasts."

" You might as well leave 'em alone, I'd have thought," said the passenger. " Better, if you can't control them."

" And that's what I'd do," the policeman replied, " if I had my way ; but if I keep quiet and let 'em go their mile, it's—' Where was that policeman last night ? I never heard a sound of his voice all the time the row was on.' And then somebody'll report me. And the captain'll say : ' Why didn't you try and stop

that disturbance, night-watchman? What do you think you're here for? Don't let me hear any more complaints about you.' He knows, I know, we all know, it's no use talking to them, but we've got to make a show of trying to keep 'em quiet."

The Chismans' cabin was on B deck, the uppermost of the lower decks and high above the water-line, where, with the port-hole open, the air at night was not uncomfortably warm. The noise was scarcely heard here, and thus Mrs. Chisman could go to bed and sleep at her usual early hour. She might even have slept in a deck cabin or on the poop itself, for she had a gift for sleep, and the sea air made her sleep the more. She retired after a supper of bread and cheese and beer at half-past eight and was practically dead till morning. The children went to bed at the same time, and then Chisman and Nellie met. A dance or a kinema show would be in progress. They did not go to the poop, as in the days of cold and windy weather, when the poop had been almost deserted. They stole aft along a narrow promenade which ran round the stern of the ship below the poop. It was little frequented at night, and at the end, where the wake streamed ghostly into the darkness, were coils of ropes on which they sat.

At ten o'clock they would say good night.

CHAPTER NINE

THEY HAD MET.

For Chisman this was the hour to which from morning the day climbed, as to its apex. A lowly apex, for it held no raptures. It was but a happy hour.

"There's someone along there," said Nellie. She was standing by the bulwarks, on the starboard side of the well-deck, where it was dark. Forward, the ship's band was playing, and many couples were dancing under brilliant lights. Aft, there was one dim lamp and a shaft of light thrown from a vestibule that led to stairs and the bar and the deck cabins.

"Who?" said Chisman.

"I think it's the Grocer and his wife. They've been walking up and down. Can't you see them?"

He looked and made out two figures at the stern.

"We'll wait awhile," he said. It was pretty dark at the stern, but the Grocer's wife might recognise them, and she was a gossip. When there was anyone on this promenade, it was their habit to go one along one side of it and the other along the other. At the stern itself there was seldom anybody. The great coils of rope took up so much room that it was impossible to set chairs there.

" They're coming back now," said Nellie.

The Grocer and his wife drew near. They were middle-aged people of ordinary and grocer-like appearance. They passed on to the bright lights and the dance, where they stood among the onlookers.

" Now I think we might go," said Chisman, who had been standing in front of Nellie, to shield her from view. " It's a quarter-past nine. They'll be going to bed when they've seen enough of the dancing."

Nellie agreed, and they walked aft and sat down. He put his arm gently round Nellie, and she leaned gently against him. It was dangerous to be otherwise than gentle, Chisman had found, if the compact of friendship was to be observed. He did not grudge the restraint ; it was necessary, it was right : freedom could only lead to what would be abominable, criminal : he had realised that when he had kissed Nellie for the first time. That instant had shown him the pit that yawned for him. Liberty meant betrayal, of her, of his word, of her trust ; it meant remorse, the slaughter of self-respect and happiness. He knew all that, but he did not know how much restraint he was putting on himself.

This evening, however, he experienced some difficulty in making his embrace of Nellie as gentle as it ought to be. Restraint needs tranquillity of mind to support it, and Chisman's mind was not tranquil. He was in a restless, rebellious mood. Ann had been tramping on his feet again, and his head in the stars was protesting. She kept waking him out of his trance ; he was sick of her ; she was too much. And in the state of nervous disquiet to which she had brought him he was seeing the future too clearly ; it

had come to meet him. He saw the present too with an unusual, vexing and vaguely alarming clarity.

"I wish," he said, "we hadn't to play this hole-and-corner game."

"What's the good of wishing?" she answered gently. "It wouldn't do to let everyone see us together, would it? People would be sure to think something wrong."

"I know. I was only wishing. I don't say we can stop it. But it kind of—riles me sometimes."

"Why?" she questioned.

"This having to hide, as if we were doing something wrong. I don't *like* it."

"Don't you want to meet me any more?" said Nellie.

"Good lord! Don't *you* start taking me up wrong." The arm that was about her waist contracted. "I like things to be above board, that's all I mean."

"You don't know quite what you do mean, do you?" said Nellie lightly. "You're out of humour to-night."

"And haven't I reason to be?" he said significantly.

"I don't know. What special reason? Has something happened, Ernie?"

"Nothing needs to happen," he answered sombrely. "A man gets a better view now and then of the way things really stand, and that's what I've got this evening, Nellie; and it gives me the hump."

"Well, we can't alter it," she said quietly. "You know that."

"Can't!" he repeated. "Can't! I'm beginning to think there's too much 'can't' in my life. Can't's a coward's word, my dad used to tell me."

"You're spoiling our hour," said Nellie, "talking in this way."

He knew he was. He had to spoil it.

"You don't care, I suppose."

"Care for what?" Her tone suggested an inexhaustible patience.

"Why, care that I've got to do without you for all the rest of my life. Care that we've got to say good-bye when we leave this ship."

"What's the use of caring? We can't help it."

There was a soft stubbornness about her that nettled him.

"I don't believe you do care," he declared. "I believe you'll just leave this ship and forget me."

"I shall never forget you," she said with an utter simplicity.

"But you don't seem to—feel," he exclaimed, exasperated. "But why should you?" he added, and withdrew his arm from her. He was shocked at the havoc he was making of this precious hour, but he could not check himself.

"How do you know how much I feel?" she replied, and there was a tremor in her voice. "Perhaps I feel as much as you do, but I don't give way to my feelings."

"No, that's it. You're too self-controlled. You'd never give way to your feelings."

"You want to make me miserable."

"I don't," he protested, and again put his arm round her. "I want you to see things the way I see them. If we showed a bit of pluck, you and I could both be happy. What's to stop us leaving the boat

at Colombo and going back to Australia? I've got cash enough. All my money's in the purser's office. Ann's got her mother to go to, and I could send her something later—or send it from Colombo even. I can earn a good living, you know, Nellie. I could send her a regular remittance, and have enough for ourselves if we lived in a quiet way."

"That's out of the question. I wouldn't do it, and you know I wouldn't."

"But why not," he implored, "if we could both be happy?"

"We couldn't," she rejoined emphatically. "I couldn't, at any rate; and if I wasn't happy, you wouldn't be. It would be on my conscience. I could never get rid of it."

"Why should it be, if I made it all right for Ann and the kids?" Whether he could or not he did not know. Without calculating, he had persuaded himself that this was possible.

Nellie did not query this point. "Because Ann's your wife," she replied unhesitatingly. "You took her for better or worse. There's no getting past that," she pronounced with conviction.

"That's taking a narrow view. You're too religious, Nellie."

"I've got my ways of thinking."

"But there's no sense in 'em, it seems to me."

"If I were to do what you want," she continued, "I could never look my father and mother in the face again. And," she added, "I could never look myself in the face again, and that would be even worse."

He was up against a brick wall. He had guessed

the existence of it on the night when he had hinted at the step which he had just now proposed to her. Since then he had learned a good deal about her, and about her parents, earnest Christians of the old school. Good people, no doubt, but rigid fanatics, he privately termed them. And she had inherited some of their fanaticism ; it was in her, in her blood ; it hadn't been taught her.

" You're a slave to your principles," he said. " You aren't open to reason."

" I can't help being what I am," she answered. " Listen, Ernie. I told you I'd never forget you." Her voice quivered again. " And what's more, I doubt if I shall ever think of another man. But I can't do what you want. It isn't possible. There's something stops me from doing it."

" It's not that you care for Ann," said Chisman moodily.

" Perhaps I don't, much—not in the way you mean. But, anyhow, there's the children. You know very well you couldn't part with them, if it came to the point of doing it ; and I couldn't part you from them."

" It would be a wrench," said Chisman reflectively. " But I could, for you, Nellie. And Ann might give them up later on."

" We needn't consider ' mights ' and ' ifs.' My mind's made up, and you'll have to make up yours, Ernie. Let's go on being friends as we have been. If you won't—I can't do anything more."

" It's the afterwards I can't bear to look at," he blurted out. " Nellie, it's a fact, I can't face the

future ! To meet you and lose you and be left with Ann—it's too big a pill to swallow ! "

She turned a distressed face to him and laid a hand on his arm.

" Don't talk like that," she begged. " What's the good, oh what's the good, of making ourselves miserable ! "

Her change of tune had its effect on Chisman, but not the effect intended. Instinct told him that here was his chance to take her, and conscience stood aside.

" Nellie," he murmured huskily, " Nellie ! " He pressed hard kisses on her mouth.

She lay limp in his arms and made no answer.

Chisman's heart savagely exulted. She was his to conquer. He had but to have his way with her now and he would have his way hereafter. All her resistance would end with this surrender. She would leave the boat at Colombo and return to Australia with him. Later, when Ann had divorced him, they would be married. A glowing future unrolled itself.

" Nellie ! " he said again. In the dim light he could see her face quite clearly, and he looked at it for a sign. He did not need a sign, but he desired one.

Her lips were parted, her eyes wide open. They were staring at him softly but awfully. There was woe in them—an unspeakable woe—and there was an unqualified forgiveness.

His arms fell from her.

" That was a tight hug, Nellie. Didn't hurt you, did I ? " he said when he had got command of his natural voice.

"You took my breath away. I wasn't expecting it." She gave a little broken laugh.

He could look at her now without feeling as if he were Judas and she the crucified Christ. That had been a dreadful instant for him.

"What were we talking about?" he said.

"What were we? I forget."

"I know. I was making you miserable. That was why I—hugged your rather hard. I wanted to cheer you up—see?"

They both laughed.

"I got carried away a bit," he went on jocularly. "Never mind, it won't occur again, Nellie. Didn't hurt you, did I?" he asked for the second time.

"No—no," she replied. "You startled me, that was all."

"Seems to me I've wasted the evening," he proceeded, "but I'm dashed if I don't feel better for it. Got it all off my chest, like. I shouldn't have made you miserable, though. That wasn't fair."

"It made me miserable to see you miserable. But I'm glad now, if you're feeling better."

"It won't occur again," he repeated. "I said things I shouldn't have said this evening, Nellie. Forget them. I know very well we can't do what we both of us would like to do. That's the way o' the world. We must just make the best of things as they are, eh? and keep on being friends."

"There's nothing else we can do," said Nellie in so assured a tone as to make the recent episode seem like a dream.

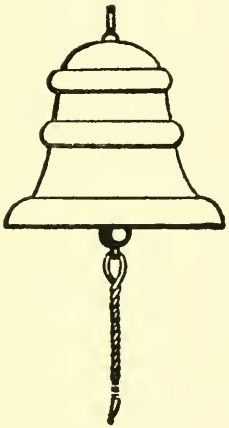
"There's four bells just gone," said Chisman. "I

s'pose we'd better be saying good night, or we'll have the policeman routing us out of here."

They rose, and Chisman kissed her briefly and temperately.

" I'll just look round the corner," he said.

" All clear," he reported, and they went.



CHAPTER TEN

"IT'S WONDERFUL HOW SLEEPY I GET ON THIS BOAT," said Ann, as she and Chisman and the children were having their supper, an evening or two later. There were cups and saucers, tall metal coffee pots, plates of bread and plates of cheese on the long tables. Chisman and the children were drinking cocoa. Ann liked her glass of beer at supper, and Chisman regularly brought her a bottle of Bass from the bar.

"You were the same on the boat coming out," said Chisman, "weren't you?"

"Was I? Well, it's a good job, anyway. I don't have to feel anxious about what you're doing when I'm asleep. I can trust you, Ern, that's one thing. You aren't like some o' the men."

Ann had been surly most of the day. On meeting him after breakfast she had glared at him and hardly replied to a remark he had made. Towards evening her manner had altered, and now she was in her most agreeable mood. Chisman was used to these changes.

"I dare say," said Chisman, "I'm no better and no worse than most of them."

"Ah," said Ann playfully, "you want to kid me to sit up and keep an eye on you, do you?"

" What for, mum ? " said Ben. " What would dad be up to ? "

" You finish your supper and never mind asking questions."

Chisman stretched an arm for the bread plate.

" If you think I need watching," he answered without looking up, " you'd better lose some of your beauty sleep."

" P'raps I will one of these nights, just for fun. I can see myself doing it," she added. " I'd drop asleep while I was thinking about it." She drained her glass. " Now, you two, you've had enough. Put that piece of cheese back on the plate, Ida, or you'll be having a nightmare. . . . Come along, now. It's bed-time."

Ann hustled her unwilling offspring out of the saloon. Chisman followed in a minute. He walked about the poop for twenty minutes, and then went down to say good night to his family. Ann, as usual, was half asleep. He kissed her, kissed the children, and left the cabin.

He found Nellie on the well-deck, at the spot where they were in the habit of meeting. The well-deck was crowded, for this was a cinema night, but they had not to fear observation. All lights about the deck had been extinguished and all eyes were on the screen.

There was nobody aft, and they took their seats on one of the coils of rope. Chisman put his arm firmly about Nellie. He was tranquil to-night, and, strangely, he had more confidence in himself than he had had on any previous night. It was as if his lapse and his recovery had made it now impossible for him to lapse again. He had stood on the brink and drawn back,

and the depths into which he had looked no longer tempted him. Nellie, too, showed a greater confidence. She leaned tenderly against him.

Chisman kissed her without constraint.

Short occasional peals of laughter came to them from the well-deck. Otherwise there was no sound but the murmur of their voices and the continual churn of the propeller. The night was thick with winking, glittering stars; the Southern Cross was low, soon to depart.

"Oh!" said the voice of Mrs. Chisman, ominously sharp and cold, like the cocking of a pistol. "So here you are!"

She was wearing bedroom slippers and a pink dressing-gown. She bulked enormously above them. She had come from the left, the side on which Chisman was sitting, and she must have stolen up like an Indian, for not a sound had heralded her.

Nellie uttered a little startled cry, and Chisman snatched his arm from her.

"What's the matter, Ann?" he said with masculine presence of mind. "I thought you were asleep."

"Jus' so," said Ann. "You thought I was asleep. You and your—Sunday-school teacher!"

"Well, what's the matter?" repeated Chisman. "I'm only talking to Miss Bodle. You needn't be rude, Ann."

"Yes, with your arm round her waist, and she with her head on your shoulder." Her head had not been quite on Chisman's shoulder, but the exaggeration was excusable. "Don't you think I didn't see you! You sly—dog!" Mrs. Chisman put a terrible emphasis on the last word. Her voice was shaking with passion.

"That's enough, Ann," said Chisman. He was feeling extraordinarily calm, every nerve in him being strung to deal with the crisis. "You're imagining things. You'd better go back to bed. I shall be coming directly."

"Go now," Nellie whispered to him. "Go at once."

"Oh, yes! Imagining things!" Ann laughed satanically. "And she whispering to you under my very nose! Imagining things, am I? Oh, yes! It was just my imagination that brought me here to-night. Nobody told me anything, *of* course! Half the ship hasn't heard about you—oh dear no! Think you can come here and sit night after night and no one be any the wiser! Cunning you were, oh yes! Waiting till you thought nobody was looking, and then walking one round one side and one round the other. And you'd try to put on innocence, would you, *after that.* You'll tell me next she was only giving you Bible lessons!"

Chisman had got up. "Good night, Miss Bodle," he said. "I'm sorry there's been this rumpus and that me sitting here beside you has been the cause of it. You and I know we've nothing to be ashamed of."

"Hypocrite!" cried Ann. "Pair of hypocrites you are!"

"Come along, Ann," said Chisman, and made to withdraw round the corner at which his wife was standing.

Nellie too had risen. She stumbled over the rope, recovered her balance, and retired round the other corner.

" Don't you dare to lay your hand on me," said Ann, as Chisman was about to take her arm. She came with him, however.

" You'll be sorry for this in the morning," he said.

" Will I ? " she retorted. " Will I ? Don't make no mistake. It's someone else who'll be sorry."

Chisman had a sickening feeling that she spoke the truth ; that all his bluff was useless to save Nellie pain. He knew one thing. At all costs he must keep his temper. He must add no coals to the fire.

" Hold on, Ann," he said when they were at the entrance which led to the bar and the next deck, where their cabin was. He must have another word with her to-night, and they could not talk in the cabin, with the children there.

" You can't come it over me," she said, but she stopped, and stood a yard off him.

" I'm not trying to come anything over you," answered Chisman quietly. " You've been listening to some lying Nosey Parker ; that's the first thing I want to tell you. I hadn't got my arm round Miss Bodle. You were so excited you thought I had. I moved my arm quick because you startled me. I've never had my arm round her." His tone rang true. He was lying with an ease and a proficiency that he had never dreamed were his. " We sat back there out of the way because we didn't want to start a lot of busybodies chattering. There's no more between me and Miss Bodle than there is between—between you and the captain. I like her, I don't deny, and I'm grateful to her for the way she's looked after the children. It'd be funny if I couldn't talk to her of an evening without having some bad reason."

" Then why didn't you tell me you were sitting up with her ? " Ann instantly demanded.

" Because," answered Chisman—and here, unfortunately, he faltered : that question was a bit of a poser—" because there didn't seem any need to tell you, and if I had told you you might have got some idea in your head. That was why."

Ann regarded him.

" You've said just one true thing," she pronounced. " You sat out of the way not to cause talk. You didn't want talk—I believe that ! But that wasn't the only reason—don't you tell me ! And don't you tell me you hadn't got your arm round her waist and her head on your shoulder. There's not much wrong with my eyes, and you ought to know it. . . . A nice couple you are ! You a married man with two children, and she a Sunday-school teacher. So refined and genteel and all the rest of it you'd think butter wouldn't melt in her mouth. But that's the way with folk who put on fine airs—and teach in Sunday school."

Chisman held his tongue with difficulty.

" Got anything more to say ? " she inquired.

" Not now," he replied. " It's no use talking to you when you're in this state, Ann."

A burst of laughter from the well-deck followed this remark. It sounded like an unmannerly comment on Chisman's dignified tone.

" Ah, come down from your stilts. Own up and be a man," Ann said contemptuously. " I can't stand a liar."

Again Chisman was silent. He did not mind the attack upon himself. He was even glad to have drawn

it ; but he sickened again to think that his lies had failed.

" If that's all you've got to say we can go to bed," said Ann. " *I'll* have a bit to say, maybe, in the morning."

" Better say it now and get it over, hadn't you ? "

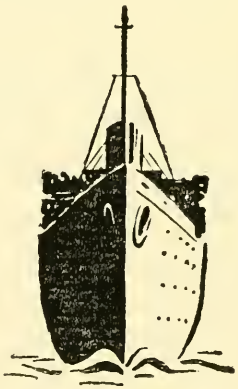
" I'll say it when it pleases me. . . . You seem to think," she added, " that you're the only one."

He turned this remark over. " Look here, Ann," he began, and pulled himself up. He had nearly said : " You can say what you like about me, but don't start saying things about Miss Bodle." But that would have been to fan the flame.

" What ? " Ann shot at him.

" Nothing," he answered.

She surged past him into the lobby, and looked back to see if he was coming. He was, and they descended.



CHAPTER ELEVEN

CHISMAN WOKE LATE. HE HAD NOT SLEPT TILL A LATE hour. He waited till Ann and the children were dressed ; then dressed quickly and went to breakfast.

Nellie was in her place. They were not at the same table, and she left the saloon soon after he was seated, without looking in his direction. She was a trifle pale, he noticed.

He wanted to speak to her, but he did not wish Ann to miss him and find him talking to her, and so provoke an outburst. One could not tell what Ann might say or do. After breakfast, having set their chairs on the poop, he told Ann that he was going to the smoking-room. Ann said he could go where he pleased, and Chisman crossed the well-deck, under her eyes, and entered the smoking-room, which was forward of it. In his passage he did not see Nellie, and thought that she might be still below. He, therefore, took up a position in front of the smoking-room door, which opened on one of the two exits from the lower decks. This was the main exit : it was the nearer to her cabin, and she used it more often than the other one, under the poop.

There were two other men in the smoking-room,

and Chisman filled and lit his pipe. For a quarter of an hour he smoked and kept a watch. Then one of the men, who was sitting by a window, looked out of it, and craned his head towards the well-deck. He quickly drew in his head and hurried to the door.

"What's up?" asked Chisman.

"A row," replied the man. "Women quarrelling. I can't see anything, but I can hear it."

Chisman had thought he had heard the sound of a voice raised. It had been too indistinct to have any character, and he had attached no significance to it. But now he took alarm. He hastened out.

Directly he was on deck he knew that the voice was Ann's. People were leaving their chairs; a crowd was gathering. The deck structure, of which the smoking-room formed part, at first hid the centre of attraction from him, but in a moment the whole scene burst on his view. On the after side of the hatch stood Ann, with her face towards him, and Nellie, with her back to him. Nellie was pressed close against the hatch, in the attitude of one who shrinks from an adversary. Ann's face was red and threatening. Chisman heard every word clearly as he thrust his way to her.

"Never you dare speak to my children again!" she was shouting. "A nice one you are for a Sunday-school teacher, that carries on with married men. So prim and so proper, anyone'd think you wouldn't so much as look at a man. Nor you would, not in the daytime! Oh, dear, no! It's a different story at night, though, isn't it, me lady? But you wait! I'll write to your mother and tell her about your goings-on. I'll let her know what sort of a daughter she's got.

The streets is the place for you, not teaching in Sunday school."

Chisman had by this time reached his wife. He was shaking her by the arm, but she was taking no more notice of him than if her arm had been somebody else's arm.

"The streets! Yes, the streets!" Her voice rose higher. "That's where you ought to be, you double-faced little slut. Don't you think you're going to get away with it. Don't you——"

Ann could no longer ignore the hand that was shaking her and forcing her to shift her ground.

"Here, you let go of me, will you? You're hurting my arm, you're bruising me black and blue!"

Chisman was holding her as a policeman holds an obstreperous charge.

"You come with me," he said.

He was strong, and, gripping her pitilessly, he made her go with him.

He had not observed the children. They were standing by, too shocked to speak or move. For a minute Nellie appeared to be in the same case. She stood, or, rather, leant, against the hatch as if she had been jammed there. Her face was perfectly bloodless and almost expressionless. At last she seemed to recover some of her senses. With uncertain and hasty steps she made her escape. She looked at no one; her head was bowed; she was the image of tragedy.

Maintaining his grip of steel, Chisman conveyed his wife down to their cabin. He flung her roughly on her bunk and shut the door.

Ann could not submit meekly to this treatment. She bounced up and showed a mind to be refractory.

"You brute! You open the door and let me out, or I'll scream till the stewards come. Look at my arm, what you've done to it!"

She pulled up her sleeve. The marks of Chisman's hand had already a purple tinge.

"I wish I'd broke it," said Chisman between his teeth. He hated her at last. "You bitch! I've a good mind to strangle you."

There was that in Chisman's voice which made Ann's jaw drop. She stepped back from him quickly.

"For two pins," he said, "I *would* strangle you—and swing for it!" His fingers twitched as if thy itched to be on Ann's neck.

"You would." Ann had begun to whimper. "You'd strangle me, I do believe. Me that's been your faithful wife these eight years. If that's how you feel, you'd better do it."

She sat down on the bunk where he had flung her, and covered her face with her large hands.

The lust for violence ebbed in Chisman. He hated her but with a less active hatred.

"Stow that," he said roughly. "It's no good howling now. You can't undo what you've done."

Ann checked the impulse to say that she did not wish to undo it.

"Do you think I'm made of wood?" she sobbed noisily. "Do you think I'd take a thing like that lying down? Hadn't I a right to lose my temper and tell her off like I did?"

"You might have had," answered Chisman, "if there'd been any truth in the things you said to her.

But there wasn't. Anyhow—ah, what's the good of talking?" His voice fell. "You've done it. Half the ship was listening to you—first-class passengers and all—and what weren't listening will hear of it. If you went down on your knees to her on deck and begged her pardon, it wouldn't make any difference now. You can't unsay what's said."

Ann caught the new note in his tone—a note she knew—and took heart from it.

"No, and I wouldn't," she said in a low, set voice. "I couldn't—not if you was to choke me, I couldn't."

"I'd choke you if it would do any good," said Chisman bitterly.

He was impotent, and he knew it. He could make the matter worse, but he couldn't make it better. There was nothing to be done. Even if he could force Ann to apologise, it wouldn't remove the impression her words had left. People would only say: "He's made her say that," and think the worse of Nellie for it.

"I'm going on deck," he said, and went out, leaving the door open.

Ann realised that she was again the victor. But her respect for Ern had risen. For a few minutes he had behaved like a proper man. It had been touch and go, she believed, that he hadn't throttled her. Now that she had given that stuck-up little slut what she deserved, Ann could almost forgive Ern his misconduct. She had really never believed him capable of going astray; she hadn't thought that Ern had that much in him. Evidently there was more in him than she had imagined, and she thought better of him than she had for many a day.

Chisman walked up and down in a wretched state. His anger spent, he blamed himself for what had happened. Selfishly, without a thought of the possible consequences, he had risked Nellie's good name and her peace of mind. He must have been blind if he could not have seen that sooner or later their meetings would become known and Ann be informed of them. She had trusted him, and this was what he had done for her.

Nellie did not appear again on deck that day ; she was not at dinner, she was not at tea. Chisman tortured himself with visions of her shame and suffering. Anything worse than this could hardly have befallen her, being such as he knew her to be. And he was helpless : it was maddening.

She showed herself next morning. Chisman was alone on the well-deck when she appeared. Her aspect shocked him. It reminded him of a flower which has been beaten and broken by wind and rain. Curious eyes fed upon her ; a passage of silence opened as she walked.

She passed on, without seeing Chisman ; and he determined that he must speak to her. She might tell him not to speak to her again, but he could not let her think that he was avoiding her because of what had occurred. It would be better for her to think that he made light of it, treated it as a storm in a tea-cup, the regrettable outbreak of a woman who was not responsible for her words.

He allowed a few minutes to elapse, and then sauntered round a corner of the well-deck. He walked to the stern. She was not there. She was probably on the poop, then. She must be there unless she had

gone below again ; and Chisman went up the stairs. Ann was in front with the children. He had hardly spoken to Ann since yesterday morning, but Ann had shown a desire to hold out the olive branch. Chisman looked round the poop, and then walked past the hospital cabins and the laundry. Beyond the laundry he found her. She was standing by the rail with her back to the ship.

" Nellie," he said.

She turned her head. She seemed to have been expecting him.

" Don't take on about it. Nobody takes any notice of what a woman like Ann says when she's in a temper," said Chisman.

Behind them, to their left, a man and a woman were seated, but not near enough to overhear them.

" Don't they ? " said Nellie. " Well, I took notice of it."

" Yes, of course, at the time. It was bad enough, God knows, but don't brood over it."

" Ann was right," Nellie remarked.

" Right ? " exclaimed Chisman, stupefied. " What do you mean ? "

" Right to say the things she said to me. I deserved it all. What have I been doing all the time but stealing you away from her ? I'm no better than a street woman—not as good. A street woman's honest. She gives for what she gets. I was taking your love and giving you nothing for it—and talking stuff about friendship ! A hypocrite, that's just what I am. I wanted you to love me and I never meant to give you anything for your love. I meant to have all I could and keep on the safe side. I didn't care how unhappy

I made you or how unhappy I might make Ann. I was just a thief, and a mean thief. And I a Sunday-school teacher ! Ann might well have said it."

" For God's sake, don't talk like that, Nellie," entreated Chisman, aghast. " You're upset, of course. Who wouldn't be ? But don't take it in that way. If anyone's to blame, I am, and I've been telling myself so ever since. It was all my work from the beginning."

" You may think so," said Nellie. " I know better. . . . Anyhow, I got what I deserved. You can tell Ann that."

" I shan't tell her anything of the sort. This has knocked you off your balance. You'll see yourself in a different light in a day or two. . . . By the by, don't you worry your head with thinking that Ann'll write to them in Sydney about you. Ann flares up, but she soon cools down. And I wouldn't let her write."

" She'd write and never tell you, if she wanted to write."

" Is that what's upsetting you, Nellie ? " said Chisman shrewdly.

" Partly," she acknowledged. " Only partly."

She made a quick dab at her cheek, and Chisman's heart was wrung.

" Leave that to me," he said grimly. " Don't you worry about that, Nellie."

" It isn't for myself I care so much, but it would kill my father and mother if they were to hear anything bad of me."

" They won't," he assured her.

" But you can't stop her. No. You're only trying to cheer me up. You can't ! "

"I tell you," said Chisman earnestly, "she flares up and cools down directly after. She'll have forgotten half what she said by now."

Nellie did not reply.

"Are you going to stop here?" Chisman asked. He guessed that she had come here to escape curious eyes.

"I think I will," she answered.

"Then I'll get your chair, shall I?" Ann would see him fetching the chair, but he would defy Ann. He had made her frightened of him yesterday.

"No. I'll get it myself. You must leave me alone, Ernie. We mustn't be together any more. You stay with Ann and make it up with her."

There was nothing to be said against this. He had done her enough damage already by being with her.

"Perhaps I'd better go now," he said, "or Ann'll——"

"Yes. I'll get my chair presently and sit here."

"Buck up, Nellie," said Chisman. "It'll all blow over. And when you want to blame anyone, blame me." He smiled and put an encouraging gleam into his eyes, but it drew no response from hers.

"I'll be all right," she answered, but her voice was dead.

CHAPTER TWELVE

THEY WERE DUE AT COLOMBO IN THREE DAYS, AND Chisman in those days kept clear of Nellie. He saw little of her, and what he saw did not cheer him : it was evident that she was still stricken. She spent most of her time at the spot where he had found her last ; which, by a coincidence (if it was entirely a coincidence), was the spot where they had sat in the early part of the voyage. Chisman thought constantly of her and wondered what she was thinking of : of him ; of Australia sometimes, perhaps, as she looked back over the ship's wake.

He told Ann that he was not going ashore at Colombo. He had no heart for holiday-making.

Ann's mouth took an extra droop, and her lip trembled. They were alone in their cabin before tea. Ann was growing anxious about Ern. She was afraid of losing him, and he seemed to be drifting out of her reach. He was civil, but he was glum and very short with her.

" If you won't go for my sake," she said, " you might go for the children's. They've been looking forward to Colombo ever since they left Sydney, and I can't take them by myself. I'd lose myself and them among all those blacks."

Chisman reconsidered his decision. He had forgotten the children ; and Ann was such a fool that she might lose herself. Anyway—what was the good of jibbing ? He had to travel his road.

" All right," he said. " I'll go."

They arrived in Colombo early in the morning. The heat became intense directly they had anchored. A fleet of boats and launches came alongside, and passport officials and policemen in khaki tunics and shorts were soon aboard. A host of touts was clamouring for custom. Nearly everybody was in the waist of the ship. Third-class passengers' passports were to be visaed in the smoking-room, and a queue was forming outside it. Ann and the children were dressing ; Chisman was dressed and on deck. He had not seen Nellie this morning. He was not for the moment thinking about her ; the renewed sight of land and the unaccustomed bustle had distracted him. His eyes wandered idly over the shore, with its massed buildings and wharves, its coco-nut trees and factories on either hand, and the sun-sick sky behind it, and over the boats with their ingratiating, talkative occupants, one of whom had managed to catch his eye and was specially addressing him. Chisman was with the crowd, and he suddenly felt impatient of it : a hot-looking, ugly lot. He would take a turn on the poop and see if Nellie was there. Speak to her, as this was not a common occasion, and Ann would not be up for ten or fifteen minutes. He could ask her if she wasn't going ashore and tell her she ought to go. So she ought : it would do her no harm and it might do her good.

The poop was all but deserted. Major Pageant had

just left the laundry with a white suit under his arm, and Breese was talking to a laundress in the doorway. The major's bedroom steward was not as efficient as Breese, but Breese's visits to the laundry, which were frequent, were not wholly on behalf of passengers. One of the laundry-maids was his particular friend.

Chisman found Nellie where he had expected to find her. There was no one else here, and this morning she had not her chair with her. She was standing again by the rail with her hands upon it. She heard his step.

"Not going ashore?" he said. He had a wild notion of asking her to come with him and Ann, of *making* Ann take her with them.

She looked at him. "I'm leaving the boat," she answered. "You won't see me any more, Ernie. I'm going home."

"Going home!" he exclaimed. "Good Lord, that's sudden, isn't it?"

"Oh, not so very. I've been thinking about it the last day or two, and I don't feel like going on."

He surveyed her. There was a strange look about her. She meant it, though. All at once he was overwhelmed by a flood of grief and contrition.

"My God, Nellie, to think that I've been the cause of this!"

"You aren't," Nellie answered quietly, and held out her hand to him. "Good-bye. I had an idea you'd be along here this morning, and I've only been waiting till you came—to say good-bye to you. You can kiss me if you like, but you must go then."

Chisman kissed her. Pain and passion smote him, but her self-control had taken control of him.

She pushed him gently from her and turned him about. "Away, Ernie," she said. He found himself walking.

Breese was still talking to the laundry-maid.

"What's up with the bloke?" he said when Chisman had passed him. "Looks as if he'd seen a ghost."

"He's been seeing a girl he's sweet on," replied the laundry-maid. "His wife made a shindy about her a few days ago."

"Oh, that one," said Breese. "It must be a serious biz."

"You ought to see his wife," said the laundry-maid. "Enough to make a man serious, she is."

"Your face'll never drive a man to drink," remarked Breese gallantly, and gave the girl a furtive squeeze. . . . "Hullo, what's up with him now? Something's struck him."

Chisman was hurrying back. Something had struck him. An apprehension that was hardly reasonable, but which nevertheless grew into a grisly fear. How strange her look had been! "Home" she had said, not "back to Australia." And she had been looking into the water when he had seen her first.

Slight reasons for fear, but Chisman might have feared had he had no reasons. The mind hears other voices than reason's.

"Hell!" said Breese. "What's he seen?"

There was a fixity in Chisman's gaze which suggested that he had seen something. He brushed past Breese, and the latter stepped away from the door of the laundry to discover what was attracting Chisman. Suddenly Chisman shouted and ran. Breese jumped after him, and saw Nellie drop from the rail.

"Woman overboard!" cried Breese, and tore his jacket off. He was wearing canvas shoes and did not stop to remove them.

His cry was repeated by the laundress, and in the laundry there was an immediate hubbub.

Chisman had not paused an instant. In boots and full shore-going attire he scrambled over the rail and jumped feet foremost. Breese, following him, dived expertly.

In a minute or two launches were rushing to the scene, and there was a stampede for the poop. There had been no thrill like this on the voyage. The crowding gazers saw Breese come to the surface and be lifted into the police launch. A ship's officer and a policeman dived from the launch. They too came up empty-handed.

"That's the end of them," said the onlookers. "They'd be dead by this time. They'll get their bodies later, perhaps—if the sharks don't get them."

The pressure eased. The crowd withdrew from the rail. The Third Steward emerged from the hatchway.

"Passports," he called. "All passports ready. The passport officer's waiting for you."

Colombo was waiting also. The passengers flocked below.

Mrs. Chisman knew nothing of the occurrence until it was all over. Then, not unnaturally, she fainted. She was carried back to her cabin, and a stewardess took charge of her.

Not all the passengers who had their passports visaed made the trip to Colombo. The Pig's mother wore a troubled countenance as she came out of the

smoking-room. The Pig was out of his pen to-day and in her arms. He was pretty and fat, and remarkably unlike his parents, who were a little sandy couple.

"Clem," she said to her husband. "I can't go ashore. I simply can't!"

"What's wrong?" he asked impassively. Having some slight knowledge of his wife, he could guess what was wrong, but it was necessary to pretend ignorance and to affect carelessness.

"Why, that woman. Somebody ought to stay with her and look after her, and the stewardess won't, longer than she can help. I just couldn't go ashore and enjoy myself and know that woman was crying her eyes out here."

"Perhaps somebody else will stay. Hadn't she any friends aboard?"

"No. And you know very well nobody liked her, because of her tongue and her cross face. As soon as the stewardess leaves her she'll be alone. And those children——"

"All right," said the Pig's father stoically. "I'll stay too, and look after the children." For a week he had been dreaming of Colombo. She too. Counting the days. . . .

"But you needn't stay," she retorted. "What's the use of you staying? Those children aren't old enough to be much upset, and they've been looking forward to Colombo, you can be sure. You go, and take them with you."

"I don't half like going and leaving you, Gladys," said the Pig's father, whose spirits, nevertheless, had risen in spite of himself. "However, I suppose it's the best thing to do, if you're set on staying. What

about the child? He'll be in your way, won't he?"

"I'll put him in his pen again if he is. You take him now, and I'll run down to her cabin and see her and bring the children up."

Ben and Ida were more bewildered and dazed than desolated.

"Did my father jump overboard to save Miss Bodle?" Ben asked when the three were in a launch on their way ashore.

"Yes, my boy," answered the Pig's father. "He died a hero's death. You mustn't grieve for him. You'll see him again some day if you're a good boy."

Ben thought.

"I don't believe he's *really* dead, you know. Not really and truly dead—like—like as if there wasn't any more of him. I feel as if he'd only gone away."

"That's all," the Pig's father assented heartily.

"I wonder where he is now?" said Ben.

"In Heaven, of course," said Ida, "with Miss Bodle. If we're good we shall see them both again some day. I don't believe what mum told us about Miss Bodle. Mum doesn't know everything. Dad knows more than mum about things. . . . Just look at that black man," she whispered. "Isn't he black!"

"We're nearly in," said Ben. "Look, Ida: I can see two white bullocks drawing a cart. . . ."

Mrs. Chisman needed attention. She was almost frantic. Putting her offspring on the floor and leaving him to roam in a space somewhat larger than he was accustomed to, and containing many reachable objects

of interest, the Pig's mother sat down by the widow and tried to calm her. While she was doing so two more volunteers presented themselves. One was a lady with whom Mrs. Chisman had had "words" on several occasions: the other was a first-class passenger whom the Pig's mother knew as "the Parson's wife." It was, in fact, Mrs. Byway.

They were thanked and sent away. "I'm here," the Pig's mother said to each of them, "and there's no need for more than one of us to miss a day's outing. I'll tell Mrs. Chisman you called. . . . Decent of them," she said to herself, "with Colombo calling—though, of course, a parson's wife couldn't do *much* less."

"The best husband and father that ever was," Ann kept wailing. "There'll never be another like my Ern!"

The Pig's mother fondled the big restless hand. It was wet with sweat. The heat was stifling below to-day. "It's dreadful, I know, my dear," she said. "But remember that he died trying to save a life. There's that little consolation for you. A brave man your husband must have been, the bravest of the brave. Everyone will recognise that." Embarrassment was making her talk on, for it had occurred to her that she had made a reference that was perhaps unwise.

"But he couldn't swim a stroke!" Ann interrupted her. "It was suicide, that was what it was! He just jumped over after her—I can see it all. . . . I wasn't good enough for him. . . . No, nor I was! Treated him like a dog I did, sometimes. And him the best husband and father——" She broke into loud, discordant sobbing.

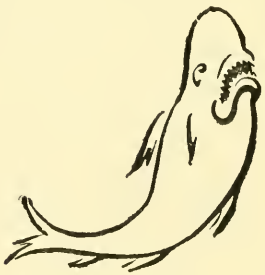
This was rather more than the Pig's mother had bargained for. Her own feelings were shocked.

"Now this won't do," she said quickly and authoritatively. "You're making yourself worse and talking nonsense. Depend on it, your husband went over to save that girl. It didn't strike him for the moment that he couldn't swim. And as for treating him like you say you did, I'm quite sure you're exaggerating."

Ann listened. She grew less agitated. But she knew better.

"Ah," she said in a little while, "if only I'd been content to stop in Australia, as Ern wanted to do!"

Ann was tasting more than the bitterness of death.



CHAPTER THIRTEEN

A STRONG EBB TIDE WAS RUNNING WHEN THE ACCIDENT occurred, and the bodies were never recovered.

Many of the saloon passengers, whose passports were the first to be inspected, knew nothing of the matter until they returned in the evening. Mr. Amersham was among these.

Breese, whose evidence had been taken by a police officer and who was none the worse for his dive, knocked at Mr. Amersham's door to inquire if there was anything he wanted.

"Come in, Breese," replied Mr. Amersham, who was in his pyjamas.

He looked Breese over before he spoke again. For a moment he imagined that he had heard a false report. There stood Breese, the same supple, assiduous flunkey, ready, as Mr. Amersham firmly believed, to kneel down and kiss Mr. Amersham's feet, if commanded. Breese, the slavish chaser of tips, the truckling parasite. In an effort to connect Breese with that courageous act, Mr. Amersham became a little dizzy.

"Breese," he said, "is it true that you jumped overboard in an attempt to save the life of that unhappy girl?"

Breese shuffled his feet and twiddled the lowest button of his shell-jacket.

"I had a try, sir," he answered. "She sank like a stone, though, and so did the chap. I had no real chance, sir."

"But—but—it was a risky thing to do, wasn't it? There are sharks about here, aren't there? and there's always danger in rescuing drowning persons. They have such a way of clinging to you. I believe as many persons are drowned as not in trying to save others. I wonder you didn't throw a life-buoy."

"No good throwing a life-buoy," answered Breese, with a grin. "It wasn't no accident that sent *her* overboard. I took that in at a glance. Tell you the truth, sir, I didn't think about sharks. I'm a pretty good swimmer, and I did what anyone would have done—any fair swimmer, I mean, sir. Couldn't stand by and let her drown, could I, sir?"

"Well," said Mr. Amersham, "apparently you couldn't. But I think there are people who could."

"There was no one else on the spot, you see, sir," said Breeze. "I saw the chap wasn't no swimmer from the way he went over—and in his coat and boots too. I had to be the mug, so to speak, sir. There wasn't no getting out of it. . . . Nothing you want, sir?"

"Nothing, thank you, Breese," answered Mr. Amersham, "except to congratulate you, which I do very heartily."

"Much obliged to you, sir," said Breese, as if he had received a tip, and closed the door of the cabin.

Mr. Amersham was just a little put out. He did not like to be deceived in people. If the fellow could

swim well, that made a difference, certainly ; but it did not seem quite right that Breese should be a good swimmer.

He spoke to Straker at breakfast about the perplexing matter.

" It's not what one would have *expected* Breese to do," Straker admitted, " but aren't people continually doing unexpected things ? Inconsistency is a feature of the human character. It's only in novels that people are consistent, right through the piece. A perfectly consistent person is an unreal person. He isn't a man ; he's a machine. And then," Straker continued, " we must remember that we never know what a man will do till he has the power or the opportunity. Take the Roman emperors. Look at the face of Caligula, for instance : it might be a bus conductor's. Or Nero's. Nero's face is utterly baffling, if we look at it with an eye upon his record. There's no visible cruelty in it. That button mouth of his, drooping at the corners, and the pouting lower lip are simply pathetic. An abnormal, you say to yourself : not a nice type, perhaps : but Nero ! Seems incredible. If he'd lived in our day he might never even have got into the newspapers."

Mr. Amersham could not recall the face of Nero, and Caligula was merely a name to him. He changed the subject.

" You aren't eating," he said.

" If I were, I shouldn't be talking at such length," replied Straker. " I never could do two things at once. I've seen women listening to Wagner on the wireless and reading a book at the same time. I can only marvel and envy them."

"But aren't you well?" Mr. Amersham pursued. "You've had nothing but a slice of toast and a cup of tea."

"I'm paying the price of a debauch," was Straker's disconcerting answer. He did indeed look rather haggard this morning. "I have a criminal passion," he went on, and Mr. Amersham began to feel a trifle uncomfortable. Straker's next words greatly relieved him. "I love food, and I have to be careful what I eat. The foods I love are the foods that disagree with me. Every now and then I throw off the yoke of diet and damn the consequences. They're painful, but I believe one ought to rebel occasionally. Tame living makes tame thinking. Last night, at the Bristol, I ate lobster, I had three kinds of curry, and I finished up with two helpings of plum pudding. It was madness, but it was magnificent, Amersham. I felt like Ajax defying the lightning. This morning I'm physically prostrate but spiritually exalted. I groan and I rejoice."

He left Mr. Amersham to finish his breakfast.

As the latter was leaving the saloon he was waylaid by the young Australian subaltern.

"We're holding a meeting here at ten o'clock," he said. "We want to make up a purse for Mrs. Chisman and a smaller purse for Breese. We can count on your attendance, can't we?"

"Most decidedly," answered Mr. Amersham. "I shall be there."

As he walked up the stairs he slapped his thigh lightly.

"Why," he chuckled to himself, "didn't I think of it? He'd know that a purse would be got up for

him, and that was the incentive. Cupidity being his ruling passion, it naturally overrides prudence. He saw such a tip as he'd never closed his fist upon before, and he went after it—automatically."

Mr. Amersham's complacency was restored. Once more he had proved his acumen as a judge of character. Straker, no doubt, was clever—a man of his celebrity must be—but he let his bent for paradox run away with him. Dig down until you come to the springs of action, and you would find that people were consistent. Discover the ruling passion, and you had the key.

Major Pageant had learned of the tragedy after he had dressed himself in the suit he had got from the laundry and was ready to go ashore.

His first thought was one of pity, his next of thankfulness. What an escape he had had ! If he had gone to the laundry ten minutes later he would have been there when the girl jumped overboard. He would, as a matter of course, have been expected to go after her : and what would have happened ? He could swim : a hundred yards was his limit : but he knew he could not have dived from such a height as that. No, he would have stood like a dummy while the despised Breese acted. God ! what would the people have thought of him—have said of him—the V.C. ! . . . Swim ? Oh, yes, a bit. Couldn't dive, though. . . . Thin excuse. There's your V.C. Another myth exploded.

He almost wished that it was exploded. Shame would be better than living in this perpetual fear of being unmasked.

He too was bidden to the meeting in the saloon.

There was a large attendance. Details were discussed, and the widow's need being deemed the first consideration, it was agreed that three-quarters of the amount collected should be presented to her and the rest to Breese.

"The presentation to Mrs. Chisman will have to be private, of course," said the organiser of the affair, "but I think we might give Breese his purse in public. If you're agreed about that, I don't think there'll be any question as to who should make the presentation."

"Major Pageant," said several voices.

"Exactly. So, if the major will kindly consent, we can call that settled."

Everyone was looking at the major. There was a slight pause. He was controlling a hysterical impulse to say: "If there is any man in this ship who ought *not* to make the presentation, it is I."

"If it's the general wish, I shall be most happy to oblige you," he said in a low voice, and added something about "far too much honour," which was drowned in the murmur of approval.

The subscription list was then opened.

It was learned in the afternoon that the arrangements would have to be somewhat modified.

Breese was the cause of this.

He said that he would like his share of the collection to go to Mrs. Chisman, as she'd lost her support in life and he hadn't lost anything. Anyhow, he couldn't take it. If he did, he would feel he was robbing the widow and orphans, who'd want all the money they could get, while he had a tidy berth. He showed an unflunkeylike obduracy in adhering to this decision.

"He got quite short about it," the young soldier reported to Major Pageant. "So I let it drop. Perhaps he's right."

"He's a white man," observed the major; and presently he went below to look for Breese.

Breese was in the Glory Hole, his own place, in the peak of the ship, but the major's summons brought him thence with alacrity.

"Breese," said the major, who was feeling grateful to him, "I hear you refuse to take the purse that's being collected for you. I think you're quite right; but perhaps you won't mind taking this, as a small recognition of your action, from me personally. If you won't, it goes back to my pocket—and stays there. Do you see? I've contributed to the collection."

"Only too pleased and proud, sir," answered Breese, and took the major's five-pound note. The major then shook hands with him. "I'll never part with it, sir," continued Breese, in a voice fraught with emotion. "You're the first V.C., sir, I ever had the honour of shaking hands with, let alone getting a tip from. I remember when your name was a household word, sir. That note's going into my treasure-box."

"Breese, you ass," exclaimed the major, "spend it! Promise—or, by George, I'll take it back from you!"

Breese's thin face lengthened pathetically. The major surrendered to it.

"Oh, all right," he said with a dry laugh. "Do as you like with it."

He turned ruefully away.

The *Dido Chronicle*, a typewritten sheet which the

purser edited, contained the following account of the recent tragedy :

" A distressing event marked the *Dido's* arrival at Colombo. A passenger, Miss Bodle, who was sitting on the rail at the stern of the ship, lost her balance and fell overboard. Another passenger, Mr. Chisman, was standing by, and immediately went over after her, and Steward Breese, who also happened to be on the spot, followed Mr. Chisman. Unhappily, neither of the passengers came to the surface again, and the efforts of Breese and others failed to locate them.

" Miss Bodle was a quiet and refined girl, highly popular with her fellow-passengers, and her loss is acutely felt. Mr. Chisman too was very greatly esteemed. He leaves a deeply distressed wife and two small children, for whom passengers are showing their practical sympathy and their appreciation of his gallant but ill-fated act."

Straker, with the sheet in his hand, met the editor coming from his office, which was between the first and the second-class sections of the main deck.

" You put it very nicely," Straker remarked, " but —is it going to deceive anybody ? It seems to be generally known that the girl didn't go over accidentally, and that Chisman couldn't swim a stroke, and went in fully dressed."

" It isn't intended to deceive anyone aboard," answered the purser. " I wrote it for a special purpose. I'm sending a copy of the paper to the girl's relatives."

" Ah, *now* I see," said Straker. " That was a good thought."

" It's part of my job," replied the purser, " to think of little things like that. The entry in the ship's log

will be brief, and the Sydney office will corroborate my account; but this will be the unchallengeable record. Whatever rumours reach the father and mother will be weightless against the word of the *Dido Chronicle*."

"Great indeed is the power of the Press," said Straker. "No abuse seems to weaken it."

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

MANY NEW PASSENGERS CAME ABOARD AT COLOMBO. A few disembarked. One of the latter was Miss Marmion, who was on her way to the further East and America. Her place was—no, certainly not filled, but, in a sense, taken, by a French lady who appeared in the list of passengers as Miss Sophie Lablanche.

Miss Lablanche was as unlike Miss Marmion as any woman can be unlike another ; yet she too had a distinction that set her apart. She was young—about thirty—and was liberally endowed with personal attractions. She had style, she knew how to dress and how to walk. Miss Lablanche knew a lot more besides, and there was something in her air that made this obvious. With one accord the ladies shunned her.

" What is the Company thinking of," Mrs. Byway demanded feverishly of earth and heaven, " to allow such a creature as this to travel first class ? "

" The quintessence of her type," commented Straker. " Outshines every woman on the ship."

There were several empty tables in the saloon, and Miss Lablanche chose to sit at one of them. She had a commanding manner and was well served. There

was never a hint in her tone of that diffidence which the menial despises. The waiters literally sprang to her bidding.

" Isn't she splendid ! " said Straker, with enthusiasm, to Mr. Amersham.

" Great," answered Mr. Amersham, although he had called her " a brazen woman " to himself.

A brazen woman she might be, but brass is splendid.

What annoyed her critics as much as anything was the fact that her deportment gave them nothing to criticise. It was absolutely correct, and there were other ladies—*ladies*—on the *Dido*, of whom one could not say that. From the first, Miss Lablanche made no attempt to gain the acquaintance of anybody. She showed an insolence that was sublime. She did not disregard people, but she looked at them as if they were zoological specimens. Young men who spoke to her once did not speak to her twice. She displayed a depressing indifference to them. She was a puzzle. Unmistakable, as everybody said : by her carriage, by her face, by everything about her. But why, then, so retiring ?

Miss Lablanche, as a matter of fact, was going to France, her native land, for a holiday. She was enjoying herself by owning herself for once in a way, and by showing the world what she thought of it. She was by no means wrapped in her own affairs. On the contrary, she was interested in the life about her, but as a spectator, not as an actor in it.

She walked the decks as though the ship was hers and the passengers had been gathered to make a show for her. She walked, verily, like a queen—the Cyprian queen—with a tripping step and a lithe swing of the

haunches. Sitting, you might imagine that an artist had posed her. Walking, she was rhythm perfected.

She at once took note of the various " affairs " that were proceeding. They amused her. These amateurs ! How crude they were. In the world in which she lived there were not two of them who could have earned a respectable living. Half of them would have starved. And these little fools, who could neither dress, nor sit, nor walk, nor stand, who had neither figures, faces, expressions nor manners, had the impudence to turn up their noses at her. Truly, it was droll. Droll, too, to outstare the louts and fops who made silly eyes at her. Excellent to be a looker-on.

One affair in particular caught Miss Lablanche's eye : but it had not failed to catch all eyes. It had a conspicuity that could not be overlooked. It was not an ordinary affair. It was even less ordinary than the Fleetwood affair, which was still running ; and for a time it monopolised public attention.

The *Dido* had sailed from Colombo at five o'clock in the morning, and next evening, during dinner, a young girl was to be seen on the promenade deck. She was lying in a long cane chair, in an attitude that suggested that she was indisposed. A steward brought her dinner, and she ate it. The first of the passengers to come up was a tall, rather gawky, partially bald man, with a long, graven face and a sallow complexion. He stooped ; he might have been no more than forty ; but he looked as if the tropics had squeezed the juice out of him. He sat down by the girl and spoke to her. She listened to him for a minute without moving; then turned over in her chair presenting her back to him.

The next passenger to appear was a middle-aged, rather stout woman. The girl saw her, jumped up and went quickly to meet her. They talked, and the woman appeared to be trying to coax the girl, who, however, ran off in a minute and disappeared.

The woman then went up to the man. He was silent ; she shrugged her bare shoulders and sat on the edge of the chair that the girl had left. She had a lot to say to the man. He had little to say. Her shrug had been a gesture of helplessness, but as she talked her manner became more animated.

This little scene was a prelude to the play which was to ravish the ship's attention. The girl was a bride ; the man was her husband ; the woman was her mother.

Maule was the name of the newly-married couple. He was, or had been, a tea planter, and the girl's mother had kept a boarding-house in Colombo. Her name was Godsett. She had sold the boarding-house and was accompanying her daughter and her son-in-law on what was not merely a wedding-tour but (for her too) a voyage of migration. Maule was a wealthy man. He was leaving Ceylon for good.

All this was common knowledge. There were many Colombo passengers who knew all there was to be known of Maule, his bride and her mother.

The wedding had been celebrated late in the day of the *Dido's* arrival at Colombo. Mrs. Godsett had drawn a breath of immense relief when the ceremony was over. Up to the last minute she had not been perfectly sure that it would be performed. She had had the greatest difficulty with Nina from the day that Maule had begun to pay her attentions. Nina had shown a childish

perversity : a perversity not altogether surprising, as she was little more than child. Maule was old, she said, and he was ugly, and he had a heavy manner : she did not like him ; she could not like him. It had seemed to Mrs. Godsett that she would never make her daughter understand that these demerits were trifles beside Maule's wealth ; that he was a chance in a thousand, and that she was the luckiest girl in the island of Ceylon.

Mrs. Godsett had had a hard struggle for existence, for many years—ever since her husband had died, leaving her less than a thousand pounds. She had had no relatives to fall back upon, and the boarding-house had proved a flimsy rampart between her and disaster. It was a constant anxiety ; more than once it had threatened, unequivocally, to fall. No one but herself knew the shifts she had had to employ to sustain it, or the worry and the sleepless nights it had cost her.

When Maule had presented himself she had almost collapsed with suspense before he declared his intentions. He declared them to her first, and besought her services. Then had followed a six months' contest with Nina's exasperating whims, her backings and fillings, her promises and her revocations, even to the eleventh hour ; and finally here she, Mrs. Godsett, was ! Bound for the land she had thought never to see again ; with the boarding-house a nightmare of yesterday, and a comfortable income in prospect. She had played her cards well, and Maule had been liberal, as he could well afford to be.

Had Mrs. Godsett's necessity been less great, she might have doubted the wisdom of the match ; doubted even that it would permanently solve her own

troubles. But she did not dare to doubt. She had convinced herself that marriage was, in Nina's case, a sort of magic medicine, and that it was, for them both, the consummation.

And now, without any quarrel or reason whatever, here was Nina refusing to speak to her husband; pretending that she was unwell in order to avoid dining with him. And something worse was looming.

It was not easy to be cheerful and to tell the forlorn bridegroom that Nina's behaviour was not to be taken seriously; that she was nervous, poor little thing; that her whimseys never lasted more than twenty-four hours; that all would be well by the morning.

All was not well by the morning, and by noon the piquant news was common property. Mrs. Maule's public behaviour gave strong colour to it, but how so intimate and delicate a fact leaked out it is not possible to say. Perhaps curious stewards listen at cabin doors. Nowhere, surely, but on a mail-boat could it so soon have been dragged into the rude light of day and so unceremoniously bandied.

From peak to stern the vessel twittered with it. The Colombo tragedy and the Fleetwood problem were forgotten. This morsel of scandal set the imagination to work; and therein lay the strength of its appeal.

Mr. Amersham heard of it early. Old Tulip, the first-class deckman, was once again his informant. Tulip was rigging the cricket-net, shortly after breakfast, and Amersham had stopped, as he often did, to speak to him. They were now on almost familiar terms.

Mrs. Godsett and Maule were promenading. Mrs.

Maule was playing tag with a youth a few years older than herself. She doubled and dodged as nimbly as a young dog, and displayed a childish zest and delight in the game. Displayed. Yes. One had somehow the feeling of that. Her display was just the tiniest bit too artless.

"Heard about her, sir?" asked Tulip, in a stage whisper.

"Er—the young lady?" said Mr. Amersham. "No, beyond that she is a bride I have heard nothing of her."

Tulip bent down. He was standing on the lowest rail.

"Won't sleep with her husband, sir." His ancient face was aglow; his subdued voice quavered. He watched for the effect of his words.

"Dear me!" Mr. Amersham ejaculated.

"Fact, sir. Won't have anything to do with him. It's no lie, that I do know, or I wouldn't tell you. Married him for his money, she did, and now won't let him have his lawful rights of her. What are girls coming to, sir? that's what I'd like to know."

Mr. Amersham did not attempt to answer this question.

"I know what *I'd* do with her, sir, if she was my daughter or I was her mother." Tulip's eye gleamed with virtuous indignation. "Yes, I know what I'd do with her. I'd—*you know what*, sir." Tulip smote his tawny palm.

Tulip's age and his position made him a privileged person, but he did not presume on his privileges. He never used an immodest word.

"Spank her, would you?" said Mr. Amersham.

" Well, she looks almost young enough to be spanked. But I don't know——"

The game of tag had stopped, and the bride was standing, as if suddenly arrested. She was glancing from face to face of the people on deck, and she had the look of a small wild animal, watchful and curious, half timid, half aggressive. Her mother and her husband appeared from round a corner of the deck, and she took lightly to her heels and skipped through the saloon entrance.

" But you wait, sir," pronounced Tulip. " He isn't the man to stand much of her nonsense, if I'm any judge of faces. You wait, sir. He'll tame her in the end."

Tulip moved on, lashing the net.

" Poor little devil ! " said Mr. Amersham to himself as he walked forward. He was in a kindly and charitable mood this morning.

The affair had not that lively and abiding interest for him that it would have had a week ago. A note which Mr. Amersham made about this time in his diary is perhaps worth recording.

" It is strange how I should have been totally deceived in Miss Windle. But I hold the purser responsible. By his talk about cormorants and his wholly gratuitous assumption that Miss Windle was bound for Colombo on a husband hunt, he gave me an utterly false impression of her. And first impressions stick. It was a grotesque view of her to take, considering that her father is one of the best-known pastoral men in New South Wales, and she herself is going to England on a visit to relatives. It only shows how careful one should be of accepting the judgments

of others : also of the danger of generalising. No doubt, there are what the purser describes as cormorants, though I think the name is not in the best of taste, and must often be misapplied. To so label any girl is hardly chivalrous and shows an indelicacy of mind.

" I have felt a great deal better lately ; cheerier and more vigorous than I have felt for some time past. Younger, too ; in fact I was never fitter in my life. Miss Windle was greatly astonished to hear that I was fifty. She said that I looked scarcely more than thirty-five. I told her that she made me feel like twenty-five, and she blushed, but I don't think she minded.

" The voyage was beginning to drag just a very, very little before we got to Colombo, but I feel now as if I should like it to go on for ever. There is no doubt that a long sea voyage, in pleasant company, is the finest medicine to be had."

This was one of the longest entries in the diary.

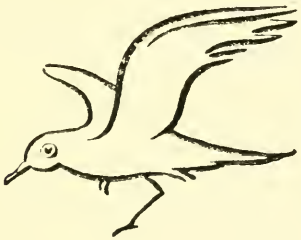
Having concluded it Mr. Amersham turned back the leaves. He turned them slowly and thoughtfully, and coming to the place he was looking for, he frowned.

" . . . Really the manœuvres of Miss Windle are even more outrageous. I have never seen such audacity. The woman seems to be desperate. Thank Heaven I am not a young man."

Prejudiced though he had been by the purser's slanders, how had he ever come to write such a passage as that ! It was appalling. Mr. Amersham grew hot as he read the words. He suffered. They could not be allowed to stand : rather than that, he would destroy the diary. Merely to erase them was

not enough : to his eyes at least they would shine out in letters of fire from under the erasure. What then ? Excise the page ? All the Civil Servant in Mr. Amersham cried out against the mutilation of a record. That, to his trained mind, was sacrilege.

He committed it.



CHAPTER FIFTEEN

INDIANS AND CINGALESE, SOME IN THEIR NATIVE DRESS, some in the clothing of sahibs ; Englishmen in khaki shirts and shorts, the subordinates of the Anglo-Indian world ; Eurasians, men and women, and a sprinkling of the earth's floating population, were a portion of the miscellaneous gatherings of the third class from Colombo. Others were simply unclassifiable. Altogether they brightened, though they crowded, the after part of the ship.

Not the least remarkable of them was a musician. His name was Ettrick, and he was known as the Demon Fiddler. The ship did not bestow this appellation on him ; it was Ettrick's professional byname. As the Demon Fiddler he figured on vaudeville bills.

He at once became friendly with O'Malley, the raffish-looking Australian. They had an affinity. Both were deep drinkers.

Ettrick had the hair of a musician and a rather curious leonine face, which did not, however, give him an air of nobility. There was something shabby about him. In spite of his peculiar cast of countenance, there was little in it to suggest the King of Beasts. One may see lions at the Zoo who are like him in this

respect. They make one wonder how they came by the title.

But Ettrick deserved his title of the Demon Fiddler. He could do almost anything with a fiddle, except the last thing : draw the soul out of it. That was why he was on the vaudeville instead of the concert stage.

Nevertheless, he was a far more unusual man than many who have earned and acquired much higher reputations. From his earliest years he had shown a bent for music, but this, as he grew, had been countered by a bent for physical action. His father, a London shopkeeper, had allowed him to be taught the violin, but had been several times on the point of stopping the lessons. The boy, though exceedingly apt, played truant too often. At the time of the Yukon gold rush he was sixteen years of age and employed in his father's shop. He was there against his will, but his father had promised that as soon as his music teacher certified him as competent to earn a living, he could go his own way. He had applied himself more steadily to his music then, and was making excellent progress and winning high reports, when suddenly he disappeared. His family learned a few weeks later that he had stowed away in a steamer bound for Montreal and was working his way to the Yukon.

Ettrick had reached the Yukon, and, what was an even greater feat, had got safely away from it. The sufferings, the privations and the dangers attendant on that exploit made an ineffaceable impression on him ; and he discovered that he was not born for the life of adventure. He was thoroughly daunted by his experiences ; his nerve had failed him on several

occasions. Nevertheless, the conflict in him was not ended. He continued to lust for those activities for which, physically, he was unadapted. The immediate result of his trial was to send him to New York, where, with the fiddle which he had brought with him, and by means of which he had worked his way to Alaska and back, he earned a living in the streets.

His playing attracted the attention of an old musician, the first violin in a theatre orchestra. He found the boy employment and became his teacher. The ease with which Ettrick learned, and his natural ability, roused the old man's enthusiasm. He prophesied at first a great career for Ettrick, but further experience of his pupil was not so gratifying.

"What is the matter with you?" he said one day. "You are holding something back. You are not giving the whole of yourself. You must give the whole of yourself to art, if you give anything. You have the power, I'm sure, but you don't use that last ounce of it that makes the difference between good playing and great playing. There are thousands of good violinists. I am one myself: but you—you ought to be more than that. What," he repeated, "is the matter with you?"

Not knowing, Ettrick could not say what was the matter with him: that he was a man divided against himself. But he too knew that there was something radically wrong with him, from his moods of bitterness and rebellion. There were hours when he hated his art.

"I can do no more for you," said his master at last. "Technically you have got beyond me. I have made you a good musician. I cannot make you a great

artist. That rests with you, if you are to become one. You have disappointed me, Ettrick."

He was not quite just in blaming Ettrick, for it did not rest with Ettrick to become a great artist. Nature, in making him what he was, had forbidden that.

Ettrick appeared on concert platforms. His playing was admired ; his technique was praised ; but he did not succeed—quite. He went to London, and it was the same story. "Not quite" was the verdict of critics and the verdict of audiences. Producers, who thought that they had found a new star, ceased to offer him engagements. Then it was that he resolved to try the vaudeville stage. On this lower plane his success was immediate. The one thing he could not do was what, here, he was not required to do. His slickness, his cleverness, and a certain gift of comic appeal that he had, went straight to the hearts of his hearers. He was twice encored on his first appearance. This success pleased him in the beginning, but afterwards it became a bitter pill to swallow, for the artist in him had had serious ambitions. To succeed as a serious musician had been the compensation he had looked forward to—unconsciously, perhaps, but none the less hungrily—for the loss of a life of action. His conceit was cruelly hurt when he reflected that now he had found his level. A musical clown ! He felt inclined to break his bow and smash his violin when he realised that this was the part he was cast for.

But he accepted it. He found solace in beer. It made acceptance easier.

Having a strong constitution, he was able to drink large quantities of beer without being much the worse

for it. At least he did not lose his technical ability and his gift of comic appeal. He could have had engagements all the year round in England, but he grew tired of England : he grew tired of any place where he stayed long : and he travelled about the world. Travel soothed, to a certain extent, the demon of action. Moreover, there was this fault in Ettrick : he was a trouble-maker. When trouble arose in a company of which he was a member, Ettrick was usually the cause of it ; and the troubles that he made rebounded upon him. He was too good a draw to be refused a show, but managers were often glad when he had passed on. It was even a relief to know that he was out of England. This proclivity of his was an outcome of the incessant conflict in him. Denied peace within, he could not for long suffer peace without.

Ettrick could easily have afforded to travel first class. This he never did. He preferred the third for the greater latitude it allowed him, and because he felt more at home among the steerage folk. Also, the money saved was so much more for expenditure on malt liquor. Whether he was in the tropics or in Scotland Ettrick stuck to beer.

The prohibition of spirits in the third class did not therefore affect him.

All the same, he made it serve his turn.

He and O'Malley were sitting at a table in the bar on the third day out from Colombo. The bar was crowded. It was thirsty weather.

"I don't see a man," said Ettrick, "drinking anything but Bass or Guinness. Are you all beer-drinkers here ? "

O'Malley explained the reason.

" Never heard of such a thing in all my going to sea," Ettrick exclaimed. " I'll speak to the captain about it."

" No good," answered O'Malley, " or I'd have had a word with him myself. It's not his order, don't you see ? I got that straight from the purser."

Ettrick replied that the captain was the man to talk to. It was a gross injustice that first-class passengers should be able to get all the spirits they wanted while third-class passengers were denied them.

O'Malley cordially agreed. His own sense of the injustice, which had dulled, grew keen again.

Presently the captain with his retinue entered the bar in the course of his round of inspection.

In response to his " Any complaints ? " Ettrick rose and thus delivered himself :

" There's no whisky to be had at this end of the ship, captain. It doesn't hurt me, because I don't drink whisky, but I think you'll admit that it's a hardship to men who are used to it, especially as there's no similar restriction "—he stretched an arm towards the upper promenade deck—" over the way."

" I'm sorry," said the captain frankly. " I admit that it may be a hardship for men who are used to whisky, but it's not in my power to abolish it. The rule is an order of the Company."

There was complete silence in the bar. All were listening to the colloquy very attentively. Ettrick's manner of address was self-assured and sprightly, but not disrespectful.

" Then suspend it, captain," he said. " Hang it up by the neck till we reach Old England. It won't be

any the worse for it, and some of us will be very much the better."

The captain laughed. " Pity I can't," he said.

" Ought to hang the directors up by the neck," observed somebody, and several said " Hear, hear ! " to this.

" Well," said the captain, " if that's all, I can only express my regret that the matter can't be altered."

He paused an instant : there was no answer : and he marched on.

" He could easily suspend the order if he liked," remarked the man who had advised the suspension of the directors. " The captain is king on a ship. He can use his own discretion about anything."

" So I've always heard," said Ettrick, at whom all eyes were directed.

" I've heard that too," said O'Malley, " now I come to think of it."

" It's the injustice of it," Ettrick proceeded loudly : " that's what I'm looking at. It isn't as if we were asking for something gratis. If the first class can buy whisky, why shouldn't we be able to buy it ? I guess we can carry our liquor as well as a lot of bloody profiteers. . . . But never mind," he added, " we'll keep pegging. I don't drop a thing when I take it up."

Here at last, the third class recognised, was a man. He had got up and spoken to the captain where others had only grumbled or gone to the purser. And disinterested : he didn't drink whisky himself. Ettrick's ascendancy was established.

He called for drinks all round. It was an expensive order, but it raised him to the highest pinnacle of esteem.

Some nights later, after the bar had closed, one of the frequent informal concerts was started. The singers were, as usual, on the well-deck. O'Malley was leading them.

To them came Ettrick with his violin. He was in his pyjamas.

"Look here, boys," he said, "there are ladies on the poop trying to sleep. I know a better place than this for a concert, and I'll play for you if you like, and you can sing. Come along with me."

They went along with him, like lambs, and he led them to the space outside the purser's office, where the orchestra played for the dancers. To port and to starboard were barriers which, on this deck, divided the two classes. Beyond the barriers were first-class deck-cabins.

Ettrick played softly and the men sang softly, and the deck-structure muffled the sound for those who were sleeping aft. The two ship's policemen came, and they listened to Ettrick's violin. At eleven o'clock they suggested that as the first-class passengers were now retiring to bed, it was time that he also retired.

"Is the first-class bar closed yet?" asked Ettrick.

"Not yet," replied one of the policemen. "But what's that got to do with it?"

"When that shuts up we'll shut up," answered Ettrick, and the policeman said no more. He brought the purser.

"Sorry to interrupt a harmonious evening," said the purser. "You play delightfully, but there are passengers in these deck-cabins who'd like to get to sleep. And half-past ten is the time for quiet at this end."

" That's all right," replied Ettrick. " I quite agree with you. But how do you think anyone on deck at this end can sleep with that cocktail-drinking crowd laughing and chattering in the lounge? Eh? Shut them up and we'll shut up. The first-class bar hasn't any business to be where it is—right in front of the well-deck—or else it ought to close when our bar closes."

" I didn't build the ship, and I'm not responsible for the ship's regulations," retorted the purser, who was not used to being talked to in this manner. " I don't wish to call the officer of the watch, but I shall have to if you don't clear out."

Ettrick was sitting on a camp-stool. He got up and gently drew the purser aside.

" These fellows are a rough lot," he said. " They'll do what I ask them, but you're just begging for trouble if you take the high line."

" I don't wish to take the high line," answered the purser, who was aware that, contrary to his wont, he had spoken too sharply. " If you can get those chaps to turn in, I'll ask you, as a favour, to do so."

" I will, if you'll do me a favour. Have that bar closed. It's getting on for half-past eleven now, and what's sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander, isn't it? Last night they were kicking up a row till twelve o'clock up there."

" I'll see what I can do," replied the purser. " It's the Colombo lot. They're always late."

" Right. And I'll do what I can do. But the man who built this ship knew what he was up to when he put the first-class bar where it is."

" How? "

" Why, there isn't a first-class cabin within earshot of it."

The purser grinned and walked aft.

Ettrick resumed his seat and struck up another tune.

Five minutes later the purser returned.

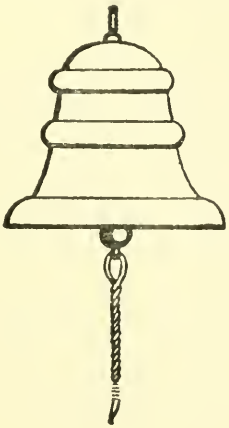
" The bar's closed," he said to Ettrick.

" Then so's our concert," Ettrick answered, and lowered his violin. " Bed-time, boys," he called. " We can sleep now."

" That's the first round won," he said to the men who trooped after him. " We'll see if we can win another round or two in the fight for equal rights."

He reached his couch, a long cane chair which he had brought aboard and placed in a quiet spot; dropped on it, drank a bottle of beer, and was sleeping in a few minutes.

The external agitation that he was creating had induced comparative peace within him.



CHAPTER SIXTEEN

THE FIRST-CLASS PASSENGERS WERE BREAKFASTING OR had breakfasted. Amersham and Straker were two who had. Straker saw less of his table companion now, and was often left in lonely possession of their seat. Miss Windle was at the present moment below, being a rather late riser. Ladies said that it took her a long time to make herself presentable. When she appeared Mr. Amersham would remark that he was going for a little walk. It was a little walk, being no further than Miss Windle's chair at the other end of the deck.

Others were already walking. Miss Lablanche had begun her rounds of the menagerie ; Mr. and Mrs. Maule and Mrs. Godsett were circling the deck in an opposite direction ; and the Fleetwoods were pacing the starboard side. Except that Mrs. Godsett was bodkin between her daughter and her son-in-law, there was nothing especially sinister in the appearance of either of these couples.

Miss Lablanche swung lithely down on the two men. Mr. Amersham's eyes carefully avoided her ; Straker's were upon her. She glanced at Straker and smiled so very faintly that one can hardly say that she smiled, but her look showed that she regarded him as a

human being, not a zoological specimen. Then she swung round the corner. When she moved, every part of her moved in unison.

"The perfect courtesan," said Straker, "is one of the rarest and, in my opinion, most admirable of God's creatures."

Mr. Amersham liked Straker and liked to be seen with him, but he did not accept as gospel all that Straker said. This time he was startled. Straker's remarks had grown more and more startling as the weather grew hotter.

"I'm told," continued Straker, "that there are so many amateurs nowadays, that it's most difficult for an honest prostitute to earn a living; and from what I've seen on this ship"—he looked aloft at the boat deck—"I can well believe it."

Mr. Amersham was not listening now.

"I think," he said, "I'll take a little walk."

"Do," said Straker. "One must take exercise. Or one ought. I'm the laziest person on earth, I suppose."

The bridal party passed him.

"I'd give fifty pounds," he said to himself—"no, a hundred—to know exactly what is in that little girl's head." He reflected that all the things that are really worth knowing are the things that can never be for certain known, and that all attainable knowledge is, as a result, comparatively worthless.

The purser joined him.

"I hope," he said, "you weren't disturbed by last night's musicale."

"Not at all," answered Straker, "I didn't hear much of it; but I thought the violin was good."

"Yes," the purser admitted, "he can play. But I wish we hadn't got him. I'm afraid he's an agitator."

"A little agitation is a good corrective sometimes," answered Straker. "But for the agitator we should stagnate. All the same, I can understand that from your point of view he isn't desirable."

"A particularly calm voyage, such as we have had, always causes a certain amount of agitation aboard."

"There you have an instance," said Straker, "of Nature finding her own remedy. Too much calm causes stagnation; and the cure for stagnation is agitation. The social body that is never agitated is on the road to death."

"Well," observed the purser, "there's no sign of death in this social body. Fore and aft they're simply bursting with health and vigour."

"Feeling their oats," said Straker. "I confess I've noticed that."

"Poor old Amersham," smiled the purser, having caught sight of that gentleman. "I never, never thought he'd be such a fool. I'm afraid it's a serious business. She's made fast to him."

Straker deliberated for a moment. "I don't know that we need pity him," he replied. "Amersham sees in her an ideal of his own. Or perhaps he sees the real woman while all that we can see is the comic mask. No man in love ever sees a woman as other people see her. And whether it's an ideal of his own or the reality that he sees, doesn't, to my mind, matter, provided it satisfies him. No, I don't think Amersham is either to be pitied or laughed at. He'll *never* see that

woman as we see her. Consider the women some men marry—and love! What sights!—what repulsive creatures! Love isn't blind, my dear fellow. Love sees what nobody else sees. That's my belief."

"It's a comforting belief," observed the purser, "as we're none of us immune from love."

Mrs. Godsett was making most of the conversation as she walked with Maule and Nina: Maule made a little; Nina none. She merely answered when one of them spoke to her. The conversation was like a web that had to be ceaselessly woven over a chasm. If one stopped weaving, it opened, and dreadful things were seen. Both the mother's and the husband's face showed signs of strain; Maule's face was very care-worn.

"I think I'll go and write a letter," he said at last. They were due at Aden in a day or two.

The back view of him was not pretty. His shoulders were narrow; there was a bulge in the middle of them; and they sloped at an unæsthetic angle.

"Let's sit down, Nina," said the mother. "No, don't run away, my child. I want to talk to you."

She did, very badly, want to talk to Nina. They were near the seat which Vera Fleetwood had appropriated, and as it was at the time unoccupied they sat down on it.

The situation was at a deadlock, and the longer the deadlock lasted, Mrs. Godsett perceived, the more dangerous it became. Hitherto she had treated the matter lightly in speaking to her daughter of it, knowing that to treat a matter seriously is to make it serious, if it is not already so. But the time for pretence had

passed by. The matter *was* serious ; it had to be treated seriously.

Nina had to an extent been tractable.

" Do show the poor man a *little* consideration," her mother had said to her. " He's most awfully upset about you. Be with him sometimes. Don't run away when you see him coming."

As Nina had consented to show Maule this much of consideration, the scandal was not glaring now. Nina romped with any youthful male who would romp with her, but her rompings could not fairly be called flirtations. They were too childish, too candid. It was as if she were trying to impress on everybody : " See what a child I am. I *am* a child. I am not a bride at all." It was possible, however, to read nothing more into them than that she was, though a bride, a very young girl. Kindly people, and there were many kindly people in the ship, acted zealously up to the fiction that Maule and she were a happy bride and bridegroom. All the same, it was generally known that the happy bridegroom did not sleep in his cabin. When everyone had retired, he slept, or, at any rate, lay, in a chair on deck. It was Hobson's choice, the alternative being to let Nina sleep in the chair, as she had threatened to do.

Obviously, Mrs. Godsett was justified in deciding that the matter had got to be tackled.

Nina leaned back. She was next to the starboard rail, and resting her arm on the top of it, she turned her face from her mother and looked out to sea.

In order to talk to her, it was necessary for Mrs. Godsett to lean a little forward.

" *Please*, Nina," she said, " turn your head to me.

You're making us both ridiculous by sitting in that attitude ; and I feel ridiculous enough as it is."

Nina turned her head but not her body, and she kept her arm on the rail.

" Now what *is* the meaning of this game of yours ? " said Mrs. Godsett.

" What game ? " said Nina unconcernedly.

" Don't make me lose my temper. You know perfectly well what I'm referring to. Give me a straight answer to a straight question—and try not to behave like a spoilt and ill-tempered child."

" I've told you," answered Nina. " I've told you that I don't like Rupert, and that I can't bear having him touch me. Isn't that enough ? "

" But you're married to him ! "

" Yes. Don't I know it ? "

" Well—what are you going to do about it ? " Mrs. Godsett's voice rose plaintively, but it had an exasperated note.

" I don't know," Nina replied. " I haven't thought."

" Haven't thought ! My God ! " Was her child actually an idiot? Mrs. Godsett wondered. But she wasn't. Nina was odd, but she was no fool. Well, then. . . .

" You're playing some game, or you think you are," said Mrs. Godsett positively. " Tell me what it is."

" I'm not playing any game," Nina protested. " What game could I be playing ? "

" Heaven knows ! You don't imagine you're going to get money out of Rupert, do you ? that he'll give you alimony and release you ? If a marriage isn't consummated, it isn't complete. And as you're the one at fault, you won't be able to claim a penny."

"I don't want to. It never entered my head that I could. I just want to be rid of him. Is that plain?"

"But you married him. What made you marry him?"

"Ah, yes," said Nina. "What?" And she looked at her mother.

"You're surely can't be hinting," said Mrs. Godsett, "that I *forced* you into marriage. That's absurd, Nina, and you know it. You were free to take Rupert or to leave him."

"Of course," said Nina indifferently. "And I took him. And as soon as I was married I knew I'd made a mistake. And I'm *not* going to be his wife. So there!"

"But what's going to happen to us?" Mrs. Godsett gasped. "Have you thought about that?"

"To us?" Nina queried.

"Well, surely you can consider me as well as yourself. Can't you see the position—the position we're both in? I hadn't much before, but I've nothing now, except what I got by the sale. And how long will that last? What are we going to do? We shall be stranded in London before we know where we are."

"What you ought to do, mother," said Nina, "is to go straight back to Colombo and start another boarding-house. You won't have me to keep, so you ought to be able to manage all right."

"And what are you going to do, pray?"

"Oh, I shall find something to do," replied Nina carelessly.

"But there's nothing you can do that I know of. You aren't even fit to be a servant. You're talking

insanely. And you know what a struggle I've had in Colombo for years past. Oh, Nina, I never thought you were heartless!"

"I suppose that's what I am," said Nina. "Well, heartless people get on, they say. If I get on, I'll help you, mother; you can depend on that. But I can't help you now, so it's no use your asking me to. My mind's made up about Rupert. And I'm not sorry for Rupert. He shouldn't have married me. He bought me, that's all he did. Mother, you know it!" Abruptly her tone had changed. "He got you on his side and he promised to take you away from Colombo and give you an income. Oh, I know all about it! You just jumped at him because he was rich. You didn't care whether I was going to be happy with him or not, so long as you could get out of the boarding-house and settle down comfortably in England. And what does he care for *me*, I'd like to know? All he wants is my body. Isn't that what all the trouble's about—because I won't give it him? If he'd loved me he wouldn't have won me by getting you to help him! It's a nice world and there are nice people in it. Ah, well, I can be just as nice as the rest of them!"

Mrs. Godsett was too horrified to speak for a minute. Practically, Nina had declared that she, her mother, had sold her. *What* an accusation! When, from the beginning, her sole thought had been for Nina's welfare. To see Nina happily married and at the same time raised to affluence—what other aim than this had she had? Rupert had certainly been kind, but that was only natural. It was to be expected that he would provide for her suitably. To say that she

had urged the match to benefit herself was wicked lunacy. A mother sell her child !

Mrs. Godsett's pain and indignation were quite sincere. For the moment she was not grieving for her shipwrecked hopes. The human mind is a strange and a wondrous thing.

" If I hadn't heard you utter those words, Nina," she said in a throbbing voice, " I wouldn't have believed you capable of them—not in your worst temper. All I can say is that you've given me the most terrible shock of my life—and Heaven knows I've had many. You *are* heartless : I see that now : and you judge others by yourself. I won't lower myself to say that you misjudge me, but you utterly misjudge Rupert. Rupert loves you. *I know it.* He loves you truly. But Rupert is a man with the natural passions and desires of a man. He has shown a patience that is almost inhuman. How much longer it can last I can't say, but when it breaks, his heart will break. Yes. I tell you that solemnly. As for my own heart I will say nothing. I shall try to forgive you ; I shall try to recover from the blow. I'm too upset now to say more to you."

Mrs. Godsett rose and left her daughter.

Nina turned her face again to the sea. Her lips were set ; her eyes were hard. She sat quite motionless and stared at the sea, of which she saw nothing but a blue blur.

People passed and gave her curious glances, but nobody addressed her. Sale commenced his first tornado act of the day, and the third-class passengers cheered him. Ettrick, with whom he was acquainted, blew him a kiss, which Sale returned with rotund grace.

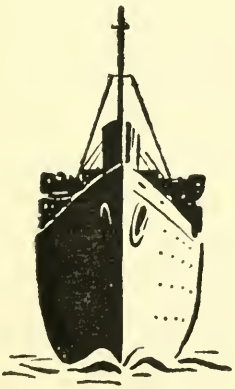
Mrs. Godsett had disappeared. Maule issued from the door of the writing-room and slowly and hesitatingly approached Nina. There was something very pitiful in his expression and in his whole bearing. It was not merely that he looked tired and care-worn. If old Tulip could have seen him at this moment he would not have said that Maule was the man to tame his bride.

He paused in front of the bench and Nina looked round. For an instant, as her eyes rested upon him,a light came into his eyes. It seemed to annoy her. She frowned ; and the light went out.

" May I sit down ? " he said.

" If you like," answered Nina, with evident forbearance. " But I don't know that I very much want to talk. Still, you can talk if you like."

" I think I will," said Maule. " There are some things I rather want to say to you."



CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

"I'VE BEEN THINKING THINGS OVER, NINA," BEGAN Maule, in an ordinary conversational manner.

"Yes," Nina replied, without looking at him.

"I've been giving myself," he laughed, "a regular overhaul."

Nina had not the faintest idea what he meant, but she was beginning to be mildly interested in these obscurities.

"Of course," Maule went on, "this can't continue, and there's only one way that I can see for it to end. I'm leaving the boat at Aden. From there I can soon catch another boat and get to England."

Nina was pleased and surprised. She waited to hear more. There seemed to be nothing for her to say.

"I feel," continued Maule, "that I'm wholly to blame. You were a child; I was a middle-aged man. I had no business or right to think of marrying you. Perhaps you could forgive me if you understood how very dearly I loved you. But I don't want to say any more about that. It would only distress you and distress me."

Very slowly Nina reddened, and Maule proceeded:

"The plain fact of the matter is that I was mad to

think that you could ever care for me. It wouldn't be reasonable ; it wouldn't be natural. You knew better all along, but you aren't to blame for letting your instinct be overridden. I'm to blame for overriding it, as I deliberately did by the pressure I brought to bear on you. So don't now or at any other time, when you are older, blame yourself for what has occurred."

Most uncomfortable sensations were invading Nina. She was angry—with him, for causing them.

" Well, now about certain steps I've decided to take. A mistake can't be undone, but it can be repaired sometimes, and I think I can repair this one. In the first place, I can give you grounds for divorce, and that I'm going to do. Your mother is quite capable of attending to that matter for you. You should be free of me in about a year. In the second place, there's the injury I've done you—and also your mother—in uprooting you both from your home. I can quite easily set that right. As soon as I get to London I shall see my lawyers and arrange for an allowance to be paid to you, and a sufficient sum of money paid to your mother to set her up in business again. I shall discuss that matter with her. I haven't spoken to her yet about it. But you needn't be afraid I shan't be liberal, Nina. I can afford to be, as you know."

His eyes invited response from her. " I know," was all she would find to say.

" So now you can cheer up, Nina. Everything will come out all right. You'll be able to stay in England, or go back to Ceylon, or live wherever you please. And you'll have no more bother from me. . . . I'd

—I'd like you to think as well of me as you can—and —and try to believe that I really did honestly love you—as I do still, God knows. Parting with you is an awful wrench—but it's practically over now. There, I've spoken of what I didn't mean to speak again. But you'll forgive me, Nina. I'll leave you now."

He got up and walked away, passing the door of the bar. At the corner he blundered into Miss Lablanche. Their apologies mingled.

Straker was alone upon the bench opposite. He had half jumped to his feet, for the collision was a sharp one, and the lady had seemed for a moment in danger of falling.

She tossed a smile at Straker when Maule had gone on.

Straker raised his panama and bent solicitously to her.

"Won't you sit down a minute?" he said. "You must be shaken."

"Not at all," Miss Lablanche replied, "but I will sit a minute."

"If you are quite unhurt," said Straker when she was beside him, "I shall consider the accident a fortunate one. I thought I was never going to make your acquaintance."

"You are the first acquaintance I have made upon the ship. I have not been looking for acquaintances."

"So I perceived; and I appreciate the honour."

"Oh, but please!" Miss Lablanche protested with a sparkling glance.

"That man walked as if he was blind," said Straker.

" It was as much my fault as his. I was not looking where I was going."

She had not been, Straker was aware. That is, she had not been looking round the corner. She had been looking aft, just over the top of Straker's head.

" Poor man ! " said Miss Lablanche. " One must excuse him." Her voice, as well as her accent, was pleasantly French. It had cadences. It was supple.

" Oh, you have heard about him and his matrimonial troubles ? " said Straker.

" One would have to be deaf not to hear. How people talk on a ship ! They are talking about you now. See how they are looking at us."

" The men are looking with envy, the women with jealousy. But we are not an affair of magnitude. Now that other affair is. You can't be surprised at people talking of it in a little world like ours. I find it quite interesting myself. What do you think about it ? "

" I ? I think it is funny—and a little sad. The poor man is at such a disadvantage."

" He is," Straker admitted.

" He is in a worse position even than if he were in an hotel. What can he do ? Nothing. In a solitary place, such as some people go to for a honeymoon, he might overcome her. Then all would be well, perhaps. It is the first step that is troublesome, as my countrymen say. But here there can be no first step, unless she is willing. If he tried to overcome her, she would scream. There would be stewards, passengers, officers, all running to see if he was murdering her. And she knows : she is a cunning little thing, that child. The poor man has no chance here."

This was an aspect of the case which Straker had missed. The unfortunate Maule was powerless. He could not attempt the smallest freedom with his bride. He could not use the slighest marital authority. Both as a lover and a husband his hands were tied ; and his feet were tied to the place he had chosen for his honeymoon. Not a ship but a desert island was what he had needed.

" It is, as you say, funny and a little sad," said Straker. " It is, in fact, like life."

The lady swung one leg that was crossed over the other. It was a leg worth swinging under a man's eyes. It had given surcease from many sorrows.

" Life is amusing until one is old," she said.

" In that case it has ceased to be amusing for me," said Straker.

" Oh, but you are not old," she rejoined. " A man does not *grow* old. If a man is old, it is because he was born old. With a woman it is altogether different. Men have much the better of it. You will never be an old man."

Straker said to himself: " You are lying to me." He was gratified, nevertheless. Many of his fellow-passengers envied Straker, the talented, the successful. But Straker sometimes thought : " What a wretched old beggar I am ! Everything that I have gained has turned to ashes, and I have nothing more to expect of life."

Nina was still where her mother and Maule in turn had left her. Her arm was again upon the rail, her eyes upon the sea.

Mrs. Godsett bustled up to her. Mrs. Godsett did

not usually bustle; that perhaps was one of the several reasons why her boarding-house had not paid. She bustled when she was pleased and excited.

"My darling Nina," she murmured as she sat down, "Rupert has just been telling me."

"Yes?" said Nina.

"The poor dear fellow!"

"Yes."

"Who would have dreamed it?" Mrs. Godsett demanded. "Who would have dreamed that he would be so good?"

"Well," Nina replied, "didn't you always say that he was one of the best men you had ever met, and it was a million to one against my ever meeting a better?"

"Certainly, Nina. Certainly. I know I did." Maternal emotion made Mrs. Godsett wind her arm round Nina's waist. Nina gave a little evasive wriggle, and the arm was taken away. "But this is a thing one wouldn't expect of the best of men. After all, no man likes to feel—well, to feel that he has been cheated. And I'm afraid you did cheat him, dear. There's no other word for it." Grave though the statement was, the tone in which it was uttered did not convey reproof. It was merely a gentle reminder of an unquestionable fact.

"Yes," said Nina with an air of detachment, "I certainly cheated him."

"That's what makes it so wonderful. I could hardly believe him when he told me. . . . Nina, you didn't—you didn't get round him in any way, did you?" Mrs. Godsett's eyes were shrewdly scanning her daughter's face. There was absolutely

nothing to be learned from it, nor was Nina's reply enlightening.

"How on earth could I get round him, mother?" she said.

"I don't know. I was only wondering. All men have a soft side, and there aren't many whom tears don't make an appeal to. But if you say you didn't, I take your word for it, my child. Anyhow," pronounced Mrs. Godsett with huge satisfaction, "the great thing is that we're saved!"

"Of course," she proceeded, as Nina said nothing, "he can very well afford to do what he is going to do, and, that being so, he may have thought that the best way out of the difficulty was to do it and wash his hands of us. You see," Mrs. Godsett went on reflectively, "he couldn't be sure that we weren't a couple of schemers with something up our sleeves. We *might* have proved troublesome if he hadn't done the handsome thing by us."

"I shouldn't have," said Nina.

"Good Heavens, I was only supposing what Rupert might have thought about us," Mrs. Godsett exclaimed in a shocked tone. "You surely don't imagine that I should have blackmailed him, Nina. Besides, I don't see how one could have. You do say the strangest things."

"I wasn't imagining anything," Nina replied. "I didn't quite understand you, that was all, mother."

"Yes, yes, dear. I'm sure your poor brain must be in a whirl, just as mine is. I do feel so *thankful*, Nina. It's really as if Providence had stepped in to save us. What would have happened to us I don't dare to think. Rupert didn't tell you what he means to give you, did

he? . . . Four hundred a year, until you marry! It's a little fortune for you. And he's giving me a thousand pounds for the loss of my home. I told him we got a mere nothing by the sale, and I paid a thousand pounds for the place, as you know, so really it's only fair. But with your money and mine we shall be in clover. If we don't care to stay in England, we can live in France or Belgium—or Italy: Italy might be better. The climate of Italy is lovely, you know. I believe Italy would be the best place. Ever since I was a girl, when I went for that holiday to Italy, I've wanted to live in Italy. England is a dear old place, but the climate is so dreadful. You'd love Italy, Nina. The blue skies, without that sickening heat; and the dark-green olive trees, and the beautiful towns and the mountains, and the art galleries and the historical interest and all the rest of it. . . . Nina, do you know, although, of course, it's been a terrible disappointment to me, I believe it's all for the best."

"What is, mother?" asked Nina, rather negligently.

"Why, what's happened. Whatever else have we been talking of for the last ten minutes, Nina? Really, anyone would think you weren't the least bit interested." Mrs. Godsett gazed reproachfully at her unresponsive child. "But there, I know you never saw the terrible hole you were getting yourself into, so you can't see what you've escaped. You aren't a bit practical, Nina. Never mind, you will be one day. It's experience that makes people practical. What was I saying just now?"

"You were saying you believed it was all for the best."

"Oh, yes. Now try to listen intelligently, Nina,

and don't misunderstand me. What I was thinking was simply this. Rupert *was* a little old for you, wasn't he? I've thought that once or twice, you know."

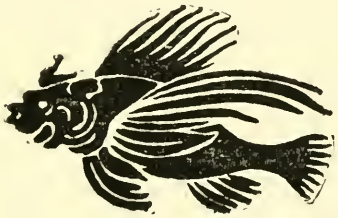
"You didn't tell me so," said Nina. "You used to say that it wasn't a man's age but his qualities that mattered most."

"I did, I know, my dear; but that was because you made such a point of Rupert's age. Of course, he wasn't really old, but he was a little old for you, I'm beginning to think. . . . I'm not at all sure that you weren't right about him, Nina," Mrs. Godsett acknowledged magnanimously. "When I find I've made a mistake I like to own to it. It's a small mind that can't own to being in the wrong. Not that you weren't in the wrong too, for marrying him and then refusing to be a wife to him. That was *very* wrong, Nina. But see how strangely it's all worked out. With the money we shall have, you'll be in a position to find even a better husband than Rupert. Not richer, perhaps, but younger—and, well, nicer. With all his good qualities, Rupert is *not* altogether attractive, I've often thought. His manner is very much against him, and he has such a bad presence. I'm beginning to feel certain that you wouldn't have been happy with him, Nina. Whereas now—you'll resume your maiden name, of course, as you've every right to do, and we needn't tell people that your income ends on your marriage: Rupert might do something if we put it nicely to him, about a dowry, for instance, supposing you were to marry an Italian—now, don't you see——"

"I've seen enough," said Nina in a stormy voice. "I don't want to see any more." She was on her feet.

Without another word of explanation this amazing child made off.

Mrs. Godsett stared in gaping silence; but her babble seemed to linger yet in the air. Its echo followed Nina to her cabin, where she cast herself on a couch that was under the port-hole.



CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

NINA LAY WITH HER FACE TO THE WALL. ALTHOUGH she had the cabin to herself she wished to hide her face. Her state of mind was not enviable.

It was not her mother's talk which had brought this about. She had fled from her mother, partly in anger, but more out of sheer inability to listen to her any longer. Her mother's monologue aggravated her state of mind. It also showed her a distorted reflection of herself.

To many people comes at last the experience of seeing themselves as they are ; and to most of those thus honoured it is a painful one. It was bad enough for Nina to see herself : a distorted reflection of herself was more than she could suffer.

In addition to this private view of herself she had been given a view of Rupert. It would be better to say that the view of Rupert had by some mysterious means revealed her own image. The two stood side by side, a remarkable contrast on which, though it gave her anguish, Nina fed her eyes.

Never before had she suffered mental anguish, which is not for children to suffer. To-day she suffered because she had ceased to be a child.

Presently the door opened, and Maule stopped short in it, his hand on the door-handle.

" Oh ! " he said. " I didn't know you were here,"

Nina did not answer.

" Aren't you well ? " said Maule.

" I've got a headache," she replied, keeping her back to him, so that her voice, coming from the upholstery, had a muffled sound. " But you can come in. I don't mind—now."

Maule winced at the stab of that " now." He had renounced her. She no longer feared him.

" I've lost my pipe," he said. " The one you gave me." Mrs. Godsett had bought the pipe and prevailed on Nina to give it to Maule for a Christmas present. " You haven't seen it anywhere, have you ? "

" No," Nina said.

He began to rummage about, in drawers and coat pockets, and on the ledge over the berth which he did not sleep in. He knocked down a bottle of pills, and they fell with a rattle which jerked an apology from him. Maule was one of those physically awkward men who are constantly having to apologise.

The pipe was nowhere to be found. Maule's eyes strayed diffidently to Nina's slim and callow form.

" Can't you find it ? " she said. " Isn't it on the shelf ? "

" No. The other two are there. I was smoking it when I came in here after breakfast, and I think I must have put it down. It doesn't matter. I'll have another look at another time. Would you like some aspirin ? "

" No, thank you. I don't want anything."

" Wouldn't you like your mother to come to you ? " He had caught a suspicious tremolo in her last words. He was almost sure that she was or had been crying.

" If you tell my mother to come I'll lock the door ! "

There was now no question about it.

"Good Lord, Nina, what's the trouble? I thought I'd put everything right." He was deeply perplexed, and he was troubled. He had never seen her cry before.

"So you did," answered Nina. "Too right. You've put everything too right."

"What in the world do you mean?"

Nina at last turned over. She brought her feet to the floor and leaned sideways against the cushion. She was looking, apparently, at Maule's shoes. Her face was not pretty at this moment. It seemed to have gone to pieces.

"You've made me feel so mean that I can't bear myself," she replied.

"But there's no need for that," Maule answered soothingly. "No need whatever. I'm not reproaching you. I don't in the least reproach you. Didn't I tell you that I blame myself and nobody else for what's occurred? I don't blame you in the slightest degree. You were worried—practically driven—into marrying me."

"Yes. That's just it. You *don't* blame me. And you ought to blame me. And on top of that you're giving me four hundred a year—for cheating you. I can't take the money, Rupert; I can't! Do what you like for mother; that's not my affair. But don't do anything for me. I *won't* take anything from you."

"But if I want to," said Maule, "why shouldn't I? It can't hurt you to take the money, and it will keep you in comfort until you marry, as you will, probably, before long. Besides, you're legally my

wife, and I must do something for you. And don't you think—I don't want to upset you any more—but don't you think you might let me have my own way for once?"

Nina was twisting and untwisting a corner of the cushion. Both her hands were thus employed with feverish industry. One ankle wrestled with the other.

"You make me feel a perfect beast," she cried, "with every word you say. I am a beast, a nasty mean little beast, and I don't deserve anything but k-kicking! You've given me everything, and I've given you nothing."

"This is ridiculous," said Maule, who was manifestly struggling to retain composure. "You hadn't anything to give me, so how could you give me anything? There was nothing I wanted of you except your love, and you hadn't any love to give me. I was a lunatic to think that you could give it me. As for doing anything for you, I'm merely doing what I feel I must do—that is, providing for you after having broken up your home. Do you think I could leave you homeless—leave you to starve?"

"I shouldn't care if I did starve; but I wouldn't starve. There's plenty of work in England for girls to do."

"Not for girls who haven't been brought up to do any work. You don't know what work is, Nina. You've had no opportunity. Anyhow, I've more money than I can spend—at any rate, more than I want so spend—so there's no earthly reason that I can see why you shouldn't have some of it."

"There is," she fired back. "You don't owe it me."

"I wasn't thinking of the matter as a debt. But if

it comes to that, I consider that I do owe it you. I owe it you for the trouble I've caused you, and for the position I've placed you in."

"But it's I who've placed myself in the position!" Nina rejoined tempestuously. "I married you, didn't I? And freely. I wasn't *dragged* to the altar—and I'm not a child. If I hadn't wanted to marry you I could have refused. I did want to and I didn't: there you are. I wanted to be your wife because you were rich, and I didn't want to—because I didn't like you enough. I knew all the time I didn't like you enough—enough to be your wife; but I didn't care; I thought I'd try it; and I just let you in. I never thought of *you* from beginning to end. All I thought about was myself. So what do I deserve?—a selfish little pig like me! You'd be doing right if you left me without a rupee. What you ought to d-do is to —pr-prosecute me."

Nina broke down entirely at this point. Her condition became abject.

"Nina!" said Maule. "For God's sake—Nina, don't! I can't stand—I can't stand it!" He spoke like a man undergoing physical torture. He moved nearer to her, quite involuntarily. His hands fluttered. He patted her arm and her shoulder. He kicked a pair of shoes that was under the couch.

Nina pressed her face against the cushion and sobbed with increasing violence.

Maule knelt. He stroked her hair—if one could call it stroking: his fingers were so agitated. He kept saying: "Nina, Nina! stop, for God's sake!"

Nina did at length grow less distraught. She showed her face, and Maule pulled out his handkerchief and

began to wipe the tears away. His thumb nearly poked her in the eye. She took the handkerchief from him. As she did so she sat up, and Maule, as if this were a signal to him, rose from his knees.

The storm was over, it seemed. He was shaken, but not otherwise the worse.

"Feeling better?" he asked.

"No," said Nina. "Not much. We're just where we were before."

"My dear child," said Maule, "it's useless to discuss that matter further now. You aren't in a mood to consider it reasonably. We can talk about it again, if you like, to-morrow, but further discussion now would only pain us both."

"When do we get to Aden?" Nina inquired.

"The day after to-morrow. In the morning, I believe. It won't inconvenience you if I do my packing to-morrow afternoon, will it?"

"You can do anything you like. I don't mind what you do."

The answer had not a very flattering sound. Maule judged that Nina was really better.

"Well," he said, "perhaps you'd like me to leave you. Will you be coming in to lunch, or shall I send some in to you?"

"I'm not hungry. I shan't want any lunch."

"Not a little salmon or something like that?"

"No, thank you."

"All right. And you'd rather your mother didn't come to you?"

"She *isn't* to come."

"I'll tell her you're trying to sleep and don't wish to be disturbed. Nothing more you want now?"

" Nothing," said Nina listlessly, after a brief pause. Her face was lowered ; she was sitting perfectly still, with her palms resting on the couch and her knees joined.

Maule retired to the door. He was half-way through it when Nina's voice arrested him.

" Rupert."

He turned back quickly. " What is it ? " he asked.

" I'm sorry," Nina said, without looking up.

" Well, I rather gathered that you were. But as I've told you——"

" You have," she broke in, " and I don't want to hear it again. I'm sick of hearing it. And it isn't true . . . Rupert, don't go away for a minute ! "

Maule shut the door and returned to her. He was bewildered. She was storming at him and pleading with him almost in the same breath ; for her last words were less a request than they were an entreaty.

" Rupert," she said : " sit down. Sit down beside me."

He obeyed. Some inches separated them but he was beside her. Nina was no longer still. Her hands and feet were moving to the measure of St. Vitus.

" What is it ? " said Maule again.

" Don't go ashore at Aden."

" I think it would be better for both of us if I did," Maule replied after a moment.

" But I don't want you to. I don't want you to leave the ship at all. If you get off there, I shall ! "

Maule stared in stupefaction at her. " Whatever do you mean, Nina ? Get off if I get off ! "

" Yes. Didn't I tell you I was sorry ? I'm sorry for everything."

"But, my dear child, your—your feelings are carrying you away. If you mean—what I suppose you must mean—I can't let you make a sacrifice of yourself to me. If you did, you'd regret it immediately afterwards; and I should regret it too. Nina, I think a hundred times more of you than I ever did, but I can't let you give me out of—out of remorse what you can't give me for love."

Nina's answer was to cast herself against him. He patted her back. It was pretty awful, this, when he had made up his mind.

"Hold up, Nina," he said. "You mustn't give way like this."

"If you go ashore without me, I'll jump overboard. I will. I swear I will, Rupert!"

"My God!" groaned Maule. "If you can't pull yourself together, I shall have to bring the doctor to you."

Nina flung both arms about his neck.

"You don't understand! You *won't* understand!" she cried.

"I don't," said Maule, who had suddenly, however, stiffened like a pointer dog. His hand had stopped its tattoo. His face was taut. "Unless you mean that you—that you think you can love me?"

"I don't *think*. What else can it be—when I can't let you go? I'd do anything for you. I'd let you tramp on me."

"Good God! You mean it? Nina!"

Nina kissed him.

There are many kinds of kisses, and all are readily distinguishable, even to the least experienced man. This kiss set the question at rest in the mind of Maule.

If a miracle had happened, well, it had happened, and that was all there was to be said about it.

He took her on his lap.

The gong for luncheon rang.

"You'll be coming in, won't you?" he said.

"Yes," said Nina, and slipped down. "I'm hungry now." She went to the looking-glass and became very busy before it.

Maule stood behind her and brushed his hair.

"It would be rather nice," said Nina, "if we got off at Aden and left mother to go on to England, wouldn't it? Mother is rather one too many now, don't you think, Rupert?"

"I believe we could do without her. But not Aden, my dear girl. Aden's next door to hell."

"And you were going to get off there—just so that I could be rid of you!"

"Well," said the honest Maule, "it wasn't only that. I felt I couldn't stand any more of it myself. I wasn't next door to hell, Nina. I was in hell."

"Where are you now?" said Nina.

He gave the correct answer.

"Then, if not Aden," Nina pursued, "let's say Port Said. We could go to Cairo, couldn't we, and wait there for a boat?"

"Yes. That's not a bad idea. It would be a relief to get off this boat."

"And drop mother," Nina thought. . . . "Rupert," she said, "I'd rather we didn't live too near my mother. When one's married one feels differently about one's mother. I believe we could have too much of mother."

" That had struck me," Maule owned. " I'm glad you mentioned it, Nina. Your mother's a charming woman, and I should like her if only for the reason that she is your mother ; but, as you said just now, she *might* be rather one too many. Perhaps she'd like to live on the Continent."

" She'd love to live in Italy. She was telling me so this morning." Nina turned from the mirror.

" Are you ready ? " said Maule.

" Almost," answered Nina, and raised her face to his.

The lovers left the cabin.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

THERE WAS TO BE A CONCERT. THE WEATHER, AS ONE neared the coast of Africa, had grown too hot for dancing : the cinema had staled, and, besides, there were amateur musicians in the first class who, except before the small audiences of the music-room, had had no chance to display their talents.

The original intention had been to hold the concert in the saloon, to make it thus a first-class entertainment, but to invite the third class to it. The purser had, of course, heard of the project and he spoke to the captain about it.

" I think, sir," he said, " that if the concert were made a joint affair, it would be much better. Since that violinist came aboard, the feeling between the steerage and the saloon hasn't improved. There's a possibility that if it were made a first-class function, none of the third would go to it ; whereas if it were held aft, and Ettrick and a few others there were invited to contribute, it might have a mollifying effect."

" Yes," the captain replied. " I'll suggest it. Who's getting the concert up ? "

" Mrs. Byway, Miss Windle and Sale are the committee. You'll find them in the music-room at eleven

o'clock, sir. They're to draw up a programme then."

"All right," answered the captain, who was taking his morning walk on the boat deck, "I'll speak to them about it. . . . I say, purser!" The purser was retreating. "Did you say Mrs. Byway?"

"Yes, sir. Mrs. Byway, I believe, was the prime mover."

"Mean to say that woman's musical?" demanded the captain.

"Well, I don't know, sir. But the canon has a nice baritone, I understand."

"Oh, I see, I see. All right, I'll attend to the matter."

At eleven o'clock the captain blew like a cool breeze into the music-room. He was a short man, but expansive, with a bright and perfectly even nautical complexion, and his snow-white uniform seemed always to be fresher and cooler than any passenger's ducks.

Sale rose and the ladies put on smiles. Sale was drawing up the programme, under direction. He and Miss Osman, the younger of the two whom the purser had so unchivalrously described as cormorants, were to act a drawing-room playlet. Miss Windle was a pianist of some ability. Mrs. Byway was to accompany the canon. There appeared to Sale to be an unnecessary amount of difficulty about deciding the order of the various items. He was not musical; he never went to concerts and knew nothing of the etiquette of the concert platform.

"Good morning, ladies and Mr. Sale," the captain said. "Splendid idea of yours to hold a concert,

Mrs. Byway." No voyage ever passed without a concert, but the captain treated each as an admirable novelty, the thought of a decidely ingenious mind. "I hope we shall have the pleasure of hearing the canon."

"I've *prevailed* on the canon," answered Mrs. Byway, "to sing *one* song. It's most *difficult* to persuade him to sing in public."

"Splendid! But tell him to have an encore ready. Miss Windle, I hope *you* don't have to be persuaded to appear more than once." The captain had no idea whether Miss Windle played or sang or danced or recited, or did acrobatic feats or living statues, but "appear" was a safe word to use. "Mr. Sale I know we can rely upon, though I always feel it's rather presuming on good nature to ask a professional to help in an amateur show. Still, it *is* a temptation to the organisers."

"If a man has any small talent," said Sale, "I think he should not be niggardly of it on a sea voyage. It will give me pleasure to assist."

"Just so: but not every professional is as generous as you. Well, now, I must apologise for interrupting you, but one reason that brought me here was this. I hear you propose to hold the concert in the saloon. Is that so?"

"The saloon seemed to be the most appropriate place," answered Mrs. Byway. "In fact, it's the only place that's large enough to contain the audience that we may, reasonably, expect. We're inviting the third class, you know."

"Yes, but we shall be in the Red Sea in a couple of days, and this is summer, remember. You may find

it very hot in the saloon at night. Have you settled on any date yet? "

"We've arranged to hold it to-morrow night. If we leave Aden before noon to-morrow, we shan't be in the Red Sea then, shall we, captain? We wanted to have it before we got there."

"Yes, but the Gulf of Aden can be just as hot. Now, this is what I suggest. Have your concert to-morrow night as arranged, but hold it on the after well-deck. I'll have a stage rigged for you there, and I'll see that sufficient accommodation is reserved for saloon passengers. The well-deck is an ideal place for a summer concert, and, by holding it there, we shan't have to bring the steerage passengers here, which I never quite like doing. By the way, are you asking any of them to assist? "

"We were going to make it *our* concert," explained Mrs. Byway.

"Yes, of course. Held in the saloon, it would, naturally, be. But there's talent in the third class, you'll find. There's that violinist, for instance. What I feel is that if we have the concert on the well-deck, where it really ought to be held, we can hardly do so without making it a joint affair, and asking third-class passengers to assist."

The captain looked at Sale.

"I agree," said Sale, without waiting for Mrs. Byway to speak. "Ettrick would be a strong addition to the programme, and there might be one or two more."

"And it would be so very much nicer," said Miss Windle, "for the poor third-class passengers."

"Well, it would," said the captain. "I do like to

consider my steerage passengers—to have a happy ship. And I'm certain that they'd deeply appreciate the compliment."

Whatever Mrs. Eyway may have thought, she saw that she was out-voted.

"Very well," she said. "The programme can stand, I think, another three items. And perhaps the concert would be better held out of doors."

The captain was positive of it. He would give orders at once, he said, to the chief officer.

"The captain is a *darling*," declared Miss Windle, when that excellent man had gone. "I'm sure it would have been too hot in the saloon. We were stupid not to have thought of that. And I do think it's so nice of him to consider the poor steerage passengers."

Miss Windle was very much happier and brighter in these days. She had kind words and kind thoughts for everybody. "I never met a woman with a sweeter nature," Mr. Amersham confided to his diary. "She is a sweetening and a purifying influence, and one that is badly needed at present. Much of the behaviour is scandalous, and the talk is worse. No one, or very few, have any character left, and in many cases, I am afraid, there is good enough reason. One would expect a better example from men like Straker. At least he need not *flaunt* the woman before one's eyes. Without accusing him of impropriety, as he is an elderly man, what, I wonder, can interest him in a woman like that? What can he see in her but a trollop? I blame myself a little for having given him less of my society of late: but can I justly blame myself? I think not.

" The termination of the Maule scandal," the diary proceeded, " has its pathetic side. Poor little thing ! she has simply yielded to the force of circumstances. I feel sorry for her, tied to a man more than twice her age, for whom she can be nothing but a toy, to be played with until he is tired of her. I suppose they really *are* married."

Before going further with the programme, Sale sought Ettrick. The committee had decided to ask him to contribute two items.

He found Ettrick with O'Malley and others in the bar. The thermometer stood at somewhere about 90°, but they were drinking the everlasting Bass.

" Have a drink, old man," Ettrick invited him heartily.

Sale excused himself. He was frightfully busy this morning, he said, and at once explained his errand.

" All right," answered Ettrick. " I'll oblige *you*, though I don't know that I'd do it for anyone else up there. When do you want me to come on ? "

" First and fifth," answered Sale, " is what has been suggested. There'll be nine or ten items. Will that suit you ? "

Ettrick gave him a rather curious look, Sale noticed.

" Very well," the violinist said.

" Thanks. That's jolly good of you. Personally, I wish the damn' thing were over, but one can't very well refuse to help. Do you know anybody else who can sing or do anything ? "

Ettrick rose and banged the table with a bottle.

" Any nightingales here ? " he demanded. " Any high kickers, any jews'-harpers ? The saloon's getting

up a concert for to-morrow night, and they find they're short of talent, so they've come to us. Here's your chance to mix with the nobs for one night."

There was laughter and some jeering, but no other response.

"Ask the Pigeon," said O'Malley.

"Why, yes, I was forgetting about the Pigeon," said Ettrick. "You know him, don't you? You'll find him outside or up above. He's your man, Sale. These chaps might sing for whisky; they won't sing for beer."

"I'll go and look for him," said Sale. "Much obliged, Ettrick. Two violin solos for you, eh? . . . Right. I'll send you a copy of the programme."

Sale quickly found the Pigeon. By the dignity of his bearing the Pigeon had restored his damaged character, and now led the singing on the well-deck at the canon's evening services there.

"I shall be delighted," he cooed. "If I may, I will sing the 'Lost Chord.' It suits my voice, and the song is a particular favourite of mine."

This would make the last of the three items which Mrs. Byway had said that the programme could stand, and Sale returned to the music-room.

His excuse that he was busy had foundation. He had not yet taken his morning exercise, and he had to prepare for a rehearsal in the afternoon. Miss Osman knew her part: she had played it not long ago in Sydney, where she was well known in amateur theatrical circles, and had brought the play with her in readiness for this very occurrence. There was not much of it, but Sale had never seen it before. Consequently he did not bother his head about Ettrick's

look, or his manner of calling for volunteers, which had not been exactly pressing.

The programme was completed, and he hurried below to change into his walking clothes.

The Maules were promenading. Nina hung on the arm of her Rupert and danced beside him. They were the picture of an affectionate couple.

As they passed old Tulip with his broom, that ancient mariner soliloquised.

" Didn't I say he'd tame her ? Didn't I know by the cut of him that he wasn't a man to stand no nonsense ? Ah, she ran up against a snag when she struck him, she did—and sarve her right, the little snippet. Marryin' him and then denyin' him his lawful rights of her ! What's the world comin' to, I'd like to know ! . . . Spanked her, I make no doubt he did. . . . Spanked her." Tulip snickered over the imagined spectacle of chastisement. These were strange times he lived in, but women didn't have it all their own way, not when there were men like Maule about. He wished to remind Mr. Amersham that he, Tulip, had predicted truly; but it was hard to get a word with Mr. Amersham alone now. Always with that gal he was—and not much of a one to hook on to, either. No accountin' for tastes, to be sure. The flash piece the other gent had picked up was more to *his* fancy. . . . A game 'un, that other gent, and no error. . . .

" What's up ? " O'Malley said to Ettrick. " Your beer's going flat, and you haven't opened your mouth for the last ten minutes."

" I'm overcome by the honour," answered Ettrick, " of being placed first on the programme."

" Don't suppose they meant it for an honour," said O'Malley. " More likely they wanted you to break the way and give 'em a good start."

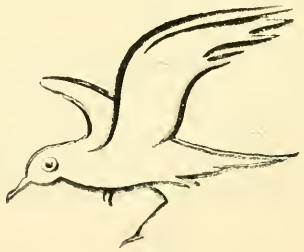
Ettrick was seething. First and fifth ! The more he thought of it the more sure he became that he had been intentionally slighted. *Everybody* knew that a star was never put first on the programme. And if he wasn't the musical star of this ship, he'd like to know who was. Fifth and last would have been more like it. But, first ! he was to be the curtain-raiser, was he ? to play the audience into their seats ?

His anger fell on Sale. Sale wasn't a musician, but he *must* be aware that the star never opened the show. Ettrick's ire, however, was not confined to Sale : it covered the whole of the first class. Because he was a third-class passenger he was to be insulted, and made a convenience for a bunch of amateurs. Insulted not only before the whole ship but in the place where he reigned.

" I have a notion," he said, " that this concert may not be a perfect success."

" Going to queer it ? " asked the frank and direct O'Malley.

" I'm waiting to see the programme," answered Ettrick. There was just a chance that Sale might have made a slip, or someone have redressed the solecism.



CHAPTER TWENTY

IT WAS EVENING, BUT NOT MUCH COOLER. THERE HAD been a little breeze during the day, but at sunset it had dropped. Dinner in the saloon had long been over, and the diners been glad to escape into the less oppressive upper air.

Most of the passengers were at rest. They sprawled or reclined rather than were seated. The ship's lights ran like oil upon the water, which was further dimly illuminated by an inordinate rash of stars.

Many men, including Straker, were in their whites. The canon was in black alpaca, clerically cut. Fleetwood, in ordinary evening dress, was walking the promenade deck on the starboard side. After dinner he had started to play bridge, as usual, but the heat had driven the party out of the card-room, and play had been abandoned for the night.

The canon and Mrs. Byway had been walking on the port side, and the canon had stopped to speak to Straker, who was alone. The canon was a charitable man—not because he believed that a clergyman ought to be, but naturally and unconsciously charitable. He was tall and plain and raw-boned.

"What a mercy," he said to his wife, "that the

captain changed your plans for the concert, my dear. If to-morrow night were like this, you couldn't possibly have held the concert below."

"With such a galaxy of talent," observed Straker, "it ought to be a great success."

"Indeed, I *hope* so," said Mrs. Byway.

From the third-class bar rose the sounds of somewhat raucous conviviality. They ceased abruptly, and Ettrick's violin was heard.

Straker was interested in the canon. Most parsons interested him. They were problems which he could seldom solve satisfactorily. What, really, did they think about the dogmas which, if they did not preach, they tacitly supported? Never, than when face to face with a clergyman, did Straker long more fervently to view a human mind.

Mr. Byway's creed, as it happened, was a very simple one. He was a practical Christian, and believed in the moral value of Christianity, while attaching little importance to its divine message. As for himself, he did not, to his conscience, pretend to believe in it, nor allow the matter to bother him. It was necessary to profess belief for the good of simple souls, and this he gladly did. If he was a casuist he was a very innocent one.

As Straker watched him now he saw a solicitous look appear in the canon's eyes.

"Are you sure that you wouldn't be better lying down?" he said, in an aside, to his wife. "You're rather white and tired looking."

"Presently," answered Mrs. Byway. "I should like to take another little walk first. I feel somehow restless to-night."

"The business of this concert," explained the canon, "has been rather much for my wife."

"This heat," said Straker, "makes any business burdensome. You must save yourself, Mrs. Byway, for to-morrow night."

The solicitous look grew tender as the lady took her husband's arm and they moved away.

"Amazing," said Straker to himself. "He loves that woman! Positively loves her. And he's a man incapable of loving anything but good, I'll swear. Even in her, then, there must be good that nobody else can see."

He sat and meditated upon this mystery, which was not a new one to him, but had never before been presented in so striking a form.

Fleetwood was still walking up and down. At the after end of the deck was a companion-ladder leading to the boat deck. Fleetwood, as he came abreast this ladder, would cast a glance aloft as if he thought of ascending it. Once he paused at the foot of the ladder.

Since leaving the card-room he had walked once all round the promenade deck and once round the deck below. He had looked into the music-room and the lounge and into the lobby outside the saloon. Neither Vera nor Anthone was to be seen.

He had not looked on the boat deck. Several times he had approached its ladder with the intention of ascending it, and each time he had turned away.

She was not up there: he would not believe that she was up there. Only lovers went up there at night; it was the reserve of lovers.

But if she was not up there, where was she?—and where, also, was Anthone?

The question reiterated itself. It clamoured for the answer which Fleetwood could not give it. He had missed them among the crowd, he told himself. At night, on deck, it was easy enough to miss people. But this answer was not satisfactory. Their seat was vacant; and half a dozen paces separated it from the companion-ladder. He almost saw them taking those steps.

Nevertheless, he would not go up there. Pride forbade it. Fleetwood conquered his indecision: he would not pry; he would not admit by an act that he suspected Vera of betraying him. To do that would be at once to dishonour himself and her, and to cut the last strands of his faith in her.

He had not known how frayed it was until to-night, when this suspicion had attacked him. One sees what one chooses to see, until one's eyes are forced open. Yes, to go up that ladder was to cut the last strands. It drew him like a devilish magnet; he must keep away from it.

He passed to the deck below, through the main entrance. On the stairs he was smitten by a conviction, of knife-like sharpness, that Vera was on the boat deck and Anthone with her. It was all over. She was false to him.

He did not turn back.

His thoughts raced forward and backward from this conclusion. It had been inevitable from the moment that she had met Anthone. The attraction had been mutual and immediate. Anthone was young and good-looking and the possessor of all the graces

which Fleetwood lacked. He might have seen a fortnight ago what the issue would be. He had simply chosen not to see it.

And what now? He would have to set her free. That was all that remained to be done.

Anyhow, what else could have happened, sooner or later? If it had not been Anthone, it would have been another. His middle age could never have held her youth. Though the difference in their years was no great matter, they were, in reality, divided by the width of a generation. Not unreasonably had that chattering fool of a woman mistaken her for his daughter!

Realisation had come so suddenly that Fleetwood had not yet had time to suffer much. He was passing by his cabin, which faced forward and had only the fore part of the ship in front of it. For this reason it was one of the *Dido's* coolest cabins, as any air there was came through its window.

Fleetwood entered, to be alone, to think the situation out. He closed the door but did not switch the light on. The curtains were undrawn.

"Larry?" said Vera's voice.

"Good Lord, you're here! I've been looking for you everywhere," said Fleetwood. He felt a perfect fool.

"I had a headache. Don't put on the light." He had put it on. "You'll have to close the shutter, if you do." She was in bed. He switched the light off.

"But you didn't tell me," he said, standing beside her. What was the meaning of this? Although she was here and not on the boat deck, he could not at

once clear his mind of the thoughts that had attacked it.

"It came on badly after dinner," she answered. "I had it more or less all day, so I thought I'd go to bed early. Aren't you playing to-night? Sit down, Larry."

He brought a stool and sat upon it. There was light enough in the cabin for him to see things in it. Vera lay in her pyjamas and was otherwise uncovered. She had drawn up her knees and crossed them. Her jacket was open at the top and her sleeves were rolled up. She laid a hand on his knee. It rested lightly there.

"It was too hot in the card-room," replied Fleetwood. "The cards stuck to our fingers. I wondered where on earth you'd got to."

"I never supposed you'd be looking for me. You don't usually come to bed till after I've gone."

He was not yet satisfied. Where was Anthone?

"No," he said. "That's true. If you'd told me at dinner that you had a headache, I should have guessed you'd gone to bed."

"I'm sorry. It wasn't so bad then. I hope you weren't alarmed, Larry."

He thought he detected a note of faint mockery in her voice.

"Well, naturally I wondered where on earth you could be."

"Where did you look?" said Vera.

"Everywhere."

"Did you look on the boat deck?" she said with a laugh. "That's the place to find lost people."

"I didn't look on the boat deck," answered Fleetwood staidly.

He felt the slightest movement of her hand. It was hardly a caress. It was an appreciative gesture.

"I didn't see Anthone either," Fleetwood went on. He had been loath to admit that he had missed Anthone too, but there was no real reason why he should not admit it. And that matter of the whereabouts of Anthone had to be cleared up.

"I was talking to him for a few minutes after dinner," said Vera. "When I came to bed he said that he was going up to the fo'cs'l to see if there was any breeze there, and to talk to the look-out man. He likes talking to the sailors, you know."

"Oh, I see. I suppose he's up there now, then. Well, if there is a cool place on the ship it ought to be there."

"It's not so hot now," said Vera, drawing a sheet over her. "I think it's much cooler."

"How's your headache now?"

She was talking as if she had no headache, he was thinking.

"Much better. It got better soon after I lay down. I expect it was the heat of the saloon that made it worse."

So Anthone had gone to the forecastle. . . . To get there he would have to pass the cabin. . . . Where had they said good night? . . . Had he gone straight there?

"Are you frightfully bored?" said Vera, breaking a short silence.

"Bored? No." He was certainly not: he was anything but bored.

"I thought you might be, having no bridge this evening. I was getting a little bored when you came

in. I'd nearly made up my mind to dress and go out again."

"Do you want to?" he asked.

"Not now you've come."

He had an embarrassed feeling. Her hand moved again upon his, and this time it did, distinctly, caress him. His embarrassment grew. What did this mean? It was unlike her to make uninvited advances to him.

Just now it was particularly disconcerting, because, while maintaining friendly relations, they had had no intimacy for some time.

Fleetwood had a great desire to respond to her, but a constraint, equally great, opposed it. He could not rid his mind of suspicion. This unexpected tenderness in itself was suspect. Did not unfaithful wives sometimes express their secret compunctions in just this way? Was it not even held as a sign among experienced men? He had heard that; he did not know whether it was true or not, but it seemed likely enough.

He sat still, and her hand stopped stroking his. He was sorry when it stopped. He longed to take her in his arms, but he was held in irons.

"Are you going to bed soon, Larry?" she said.

"I hadn't thought of it," he replied. "But I suppose one might as well. There's nothing else to do."

"But talk to me," she supplemented.

"But you want to go to sleep, don't you?"

"I told you I was nearly getting up and dressing again!"

"Oh, I shouldn't do that, if I were you. It must be ten o'clock. You'd be wiser to stay in bed."

"I didn't mean to get up after you came in. Un-

dress and lie down beside me, Larry. You haven't been in my bed for—I don't know how long."

"Shall I?" he said.

"Not if you don't want to, of course," said Vera, with a somewhat laboured suavity, and withdrew her hand.

"I should make you very hot, shouldn't I? These berths aren't big enough for two, especially in this weather." Like a fool he had been waiting for one more word of encouragement, which his doubtful, indifferent "Shall I?" had definitely staved off.

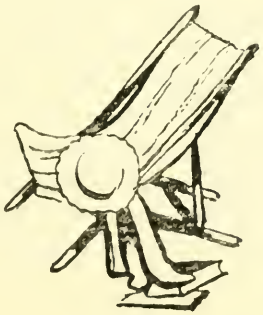
He could still have retrieved the situation, but the positive and negative forces fighting for control of him had paralysed his power to act.

"I think I may as well go to bed myself," he said. "An hour's extra sleep won't hurt me, if I can get it."

He turned on the light and raised the window-shutter. When he had cleaned his teeth and was in his pyjamas, he bent over Vera and kissed her formally.

Her eyes were closed, and she gave no sign of acknowledgement.

He put out the light, lowered the shutter, and climbed into his upper berth.



CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

FLEETWOOD DID NOT GET HIS EXTRA HOUR OF SLEEP, and he had not supposed that he would. Vera opened her eyes when the light was out.

Each moved from time to time, and knew, by the character of the movements, that the other was awake ; but neither spoke.

Gradually, as Fleetwood cogitated, he was driven to the belief that his suspicions were unfair ; that his attitude had been mean and that of a jealous fool. Had he not missed her after dinner, he would not have imagined that there was anything wrong—at all events, nothing more wrong than there had been for weeks past. Had he gone straight to their cabin instead of searching for her, he would not for a moment have doubted her headache. And, not doubting the headache, he would not have doubted the motive of her tender advances. They would have surprised him a little, but he would have responded to them. Then all would have been well.

Now all was far from well, and there might have been little or nothing wrong before. It was a dirty mind that assumed that friendship without misconduct was impossible between a man and a married woman. That had been his original attitude, and it

was the right one. He had shown that clearly to Vera by countenancing her acquaintance with Anthone, and by so doing he had manifested his complete trust in her.

That, at least, was the theory. Searching his conscience, Fleetwood was not sure if this attitude had not had other springs. Had not pride something to do with it, and a certain petty perverseness? Vera in effect had said: "Leave me alone less, and I shan't want other company." And he in effect had replied: "Don't imagine that because you've found an admirer, you can alarm me into giving up my bridge. See, I'm totally unconcerned about him. Besides, you flatter yourself!"

If she was at fault, it was mainly because she had followed the lead he had given her. He stared sickly at his own folly.

He heard her turn quietly in her bed. Should he speak to her? Should he go in to her? In a minute he might end this wretched imbroglio, and ease his heart of trouble.

Better not attempt it to-night, perhaps, was his second thought. She might not be in a mood for reconciliation now. She had been, but the mood had passed; he had expelled it. She had not made the least response to his kiss. If he spoke to her, she might not answer; or, if she answered, her reply might be so cold as to nip his warm intentions. He could not risk a repulse, he told himself.

He was making weak excuses to avoid following the course which good sense urged. There was a reason for this. He was unused to making demonstrations of feeling. He was naturally shy and reserved,

self-conscious, morbidly proud and morbidly sensitive ; and he covered all this with a cloak of impassivity.

His worst enemy of all, perhaps, was his shyness. He had made love shyly before marriage, but, worse than that, he had made love shyly after marriage. Thus he had begun his married life wrong. The tree grows as the twig is bent, and becomes unalterable. Reticence and repression in his relations with Vera had grown into a habit too long and firmly established to be broken. Not only that constitutional shyness of his but inherited inhibitions and false notions of modesty had helped to bring this about. He was custom-bound and bound also by his character. To have given a full and free expression to his love would now have been the most difficult thing in the world for him.

He was dimly but, at times, painfully aware of this. He had never reckoned with its dangers, or he might, before it was too late, have attempted to cure the disease.

At this moment it was impossible for him to say : " Vera, are you asleep ? " and, whether she answered or not, to go in to her, to make love to her without reserve, to confess his folly, and to show her all that was in his heart. Never having shown her all that was in his heart, how could he do so now, across this breach ? It needed an effort greater than his will could compass ; greater, perhaps, than he had the power to make, enchained as he was.

" To-morrow," he said to himself, " I will begin to make my peace with her. The heat will be a good excuse for stopping the bridge-playing. I *must* put an end to this nonsense."

Presently he went to sleep.

Vera was still awake. She was angry and mortified. Her own conscience had not been easy lately, and she had been thinking of Larry before he came in. She guessed that he was feeling rather badly about her, though it was always hard to tell what Larry's feelings were. If he were suffering agonies he would never show it.

She did not like the idea that he was suffering; furthermore, she was beginning to see that she was getting on dangerous ground. Anthone, after all, was a diversion, while Larry was a serious matter. It would not do to pursue the diversion too far. It might then usurp the place of the serious matter, and that would be a catastrophe.

Vera, like the majority of women, was in the habit of looking facts in the face: she lived in a world of fact: and she had arrayed and carefully inspected the facts that surrounded her now. They were not many, and the deductions were easily made from them.

She would not, even if she could, exchange Larry for Anthone: that was the most important deduction. If Larry were not, then she might consider Anthone as a substitute; but while she had Larry she would keep Larry. He was good substantial daily bread.

The danger was that she was fond of Anthone—just as she was fond of chocolates and other nice things. Anthone was tempting in the extreme. His behaviour had been irreproachable, but she had ceased to be quite sure of herself when she was with him. The temptation to seduce him into kissing her was sometimes great.

She dared not : she feared the consequences. A kiss would not be the end. She had an instinctive assurance of that. Irreproachable as Anthone's conduct had been, it would not withstand pressure. And if it bent there would be a collapse. He might or might not be in love with her, but he was young and, she divined, passionate ; wherein may have lain his chief attraction for her, since passion was not an element of her married life. If passion existed in Larry it had never revealed itself. Yet he was satisfying if he was unexciting. You did not expect him to stimulate : he was sustaining. All the same, the desire for stimulants is in human nature.

However, she had made up her mind that this particular stimulant was rather too dangerous ; which (although the headache was not quite imaginary) had had something to do with her early retirement to bed. She was glad when she heard Larry open the door. Here was an excellent chance to restore the *status quo ante*.

And he had repulsed her ! The effect was scarifying. It had never entered her head that he would reject the olive branch which she with such utter candour had held out to him. It was worse than a slap in the face. Her body had burned with shame.

Was she nothing to him, then—not even a desirable woman ? Did he actually care so little about her that his carelessness about Anthone was not assumed ? Or had he taken the affair more seriously than she had imagined ? Was his rebuff equivalent to saying : " It's too late. You can't wheedle me now " ? Did he suspect her of infidelity ? . . . This supposition made her very indignant, notwithstanding her previous

perception of the fact that a kiss, if she let Anthone kiss her, would not be the end. She had *not* been unfaithful to Larry, and she did not mean to be: therefore his suspicions, if he had any, were a vile insult. She was in no doubt about that.

But, considering his manner to her, she could not believe that he did suspect her faith. There was not an intonation in his voice that hinted at anything but trust in her. It seemed incredible to Vera that he could be such a monster of duplicity as, if he did suspect, he would have to be.

She came to no conclusion whatever that night—except that she had been abominably treated and her goodwill and affection shamefully abused.

Fleetwood rose first in the morning. He had had his bath before Vera opened her eyes to him. Neither of them cared for early tea.

"Aden is in sight," he announced cheerfully as he brought a refreshing smell of the sea into the cabin.

Vera rubbed her eyes, although she was wide awake, and had been when he went to his bath.

"It's going to be another stinger," he continued in the same cheerful tone. "We shall catch it as soon as we anchor."

"You seem pleased about it," said Vera.

"Well, it's no use grumbling, is it? Never mind, we shall be in the Mediterranean in less than a week."

He was not usually so chatty before breakfast. Vera, as a rule, had more to say. This morning she was noticeably taciturn. He had been prepared for that.

She rose languidly while he was shaving. He dressed expeditiously, moving alertly whenever he was in her way, and was soon out of the cabin.

At breakfast she began to thaw a little. After it he escorted her to the promenade deck, and they stood and gazed at the barracks and the scorched hills of Aden. It looked like a sepulchre in a wilderness. It might almost have been the remains of an extinct world.

Some desiccated soldiers came aboard. They were passengers, on their way to England. They and the mails were all that the *Dido* had to take from Aden.

"It makes one's eyes ache to look at the place," said Fleetwood. "Let us go and sit on the other side, shall we? unless you would like to take a walk?"

"I'm dripping already," she replied. "We'll sit. . . . I wish you'd bring me my fan."

He went with alacrity to fetch the fan. It was one he had bought in Colombo for her.

She was seated when he rejoined her. He gave her the fan. "Now, Anthone," she thought, "would have fanned me. Larry would never think of that."

Anthone sauntered up with a book in his hand. He said good morning, reviled the weather, and passed on.

"I'm going to give up bridge for the present," said Fleetwood. "The heat becomes unbearable in there."

"Can't you stick it?" said Vera. "You'll feel the deprivation terribly, I'm afraid, Larry."

Her humour had greatly improved, but she had not forgotten or forgiven.

" I don't think I shall," he answered. " To tell you the truth, I believe I've been playing rather too much lately. Even bridge can pall."

" But what will you do ? " she inquired, as if there were no imaginable answer to the question.

" Well," he said with a trace of hesitation and a rather sheepish smile, " I might see a little more of you."

" Don't you think you see enough of me ? You see as much of me as you would if you were at work. I think married people can see too much of one another."

" They can, of course," he agreed. " Still, I don't seem to be in danger of seeing too much of you."

" Well," she replied with deliberation, " I'm not so sure about that. Do you know what I've been thinking ? "

" What ? "

" Why, that it wouldn't be a bad idea if I took a holiday after we got to England."

" There's no reason why you shouldn't. You'll have to go and see your mother, anyhow."

" Yes, but I thought of taking a real holiday—of going away by myself somewhere."

Suspicion raised its head again in Fleetwood's mind. He manfully fought it down.

" Certainly, if you like," he said.

" It might be good for both of us," said Vera. " You might take a fresh fancy to me afterwards, Larry. Wouldn't that be nice ? " She laughed, but that did not blunt the point of her shaft. It went home.

He could say nothing for a moment or two.

" You deserve a holiday," he remarked then.

" And you," said Vera maliciously.

He winced again. But he had expected punishment.

She was pleased with her idea, which had come to her in the course of the conversation. She had been the tame, submissive wife for too long, and her constant presence had dulled Larry's interest in her. Absence was needed to sharpen it. He wanted a lesson too. She did not mean to be the wife who is taken for granted.

As for Anthone, there was no necessity for her to drop him. The ground no longer appeared dangerous : it had more the appearance of vantage-ground, to retire from which would be a tactical blunder.

For the rest of the day Fleetwood did his best to show that he was conscious of error. His perseverance was touching. Vera was amused.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

ADEN, TO NO ONE'S REGRET, DROPPED ASTERN AT NOON, and such attention as had been paid to it was transferred to the visible preparations for the concert. They were well forward. A stage had been built on the starboard side of the well-deck ; palms and other vegetation from the saloon graced it ; and curtains gave it the appearance of a genuine theatrical stage. They divided it in two, the back from the front, thus providing an off-stage from which the performer could make a proper entrance. Footlights were added ; the wings were draped with flags ; and the deck was then roped into two sections. These were the stalls and the pit, and the stalls of course were reserved for saloon passengers. As admission was free and the concert had been organised in the first class, no one could justly complain of that. There were, nevertheless, comments. The well-deck, it was argued, belonged to the third-class passengers. Why, therefore, should they be excluded from any portion of it ?

Ettrick and his particular friends were not among those who murmured ; they listened, smiled and said nothing.

By half-past eight the house was packed to its limits. In balcony and gallery neck craned over neck

as the curtains parted and Ettrick made his appearance. He was seen for the first time in a dress suit, which was brightened by a crimson sash about his middle. There was loud applause, which started in the rear of the pit and spread forward and upward.

Ettrick bowed, shook his grizzled mane, and set his fiddle to his shoulder. He played without accompaniment.

The clapping that followed his effort came with obvious sincerity from all quarters and was no more than he deserved. As it died away in front the pit sustained it, and cries of encore were heard. Ettrick had made his bows and was seemingly about to retire : he checked, bowed once more, and the cries redoubled.

He set his violin again to his shoulder. He was playing good music and using none of the tricks with which he had won the esteem of vaudeville crowds. The piece he chose for an encore was a shorter one. The programme was fairly long, and would not allow of many or long encores.

The applause for his second effort was equally hearty, but Ettrick's bows were briefer. He retired quickly. The clapping, however, continued, or, rather it seemed to make another start, from exactly where it had started on his first appearance. The stalls did not join in it now. It swelled : he was having another recall.

Ettrick's response was to show himself, shake his head good-humouredly, step back, and close the curtains. Silence was restored.

Sale's and Miss Osman's playlet was number two on the programme. They appeared almost immedi-

ately, talking, to cover an entrance that would not have been made if there had been a drop curtain.

"I won't, I won't, I won't!" Miss Osman was saying. She had flounced in and taken the centre of the stage. The characters of the play were a newly married couple having their first quarrel. Miss Osman looked very young indeed; beside her, Sale seemed rather mature for a stage bridegroom. Of course, bridegrooms *are* rather mature in these days, but the convention of the stripling dies hard.

Sale strode perturbedly in front of her, his hands deep in his pockets.

"I won't!" said Miss Osman again, as he stopped and opened his mouth to speak. "I won't, I won't I won't, and it's no use your talking."

He walked to the end of the stage, turned suddenly, and "My dear Pauline," he said.

These words were the signal for a most extraordinary outburst. The back of the house cheered frantically. In a moment the whole pit was cheering. The poop followed.

The stalls turned round, and they and the occupants of the promenade deck gazed in wonder. A few smiled. Evidently the steerage had determined to give Sale a royal reception. It was thus, though less vociferously, that they cheered him when he took his daily exercise. But why had they waited till he spoke his first line?

Sale seemed as surprised as anyone. Disconcerted at first, and very naturally, he quickly wreathed his face in a smile. Ill-timed though the interruption was, it was no doubt kindly meant, and was a testimony to the personal liking of the steerage for him, if not a

tribute to his acting. He made his well-known gesture of acknowledgment, and paused to let the ovation end.

The noise subsided. "My dear Pauline," he began again, and at once there was a fresh uproar. For a moment Sale looked angry as well as astonished, but he soon had his temper in hand. This display was very stupid, but he must take it kindly.

He stepped to the footlights and signalled to the audience that he wished to speak. He was permitted.

"This is tremendously good of you, and I appreciate your kindness immensely. I shall always treasure your generous treatment of me, but——"

This was as far as he was allowed to get. The storm had recommenced. It raged more furiously than ever, and catcalls now were heard amid the cheers. There were calls also for Ettrick.

It was no longer possible to doubt the character of the demonstration. Sale was being jeered. The steerage would have none of him. They wanted Ettrick back.

Sale's brow was dark, and his face had grown very red. Miss Osman seemed as if she might burst into tears. She was still in the centre of the stage.

Sale turned to her and spoke. He walked to the curtain, and held it back until she had passed through it. Then he bowed twice, elaborately, to the pit, and retired with remarkable dignity, while the pit roared its approval of this proceeding.

Miss Windle was next on the bill, but the shouts for Ettrick continued. They rose when he did not appears and swelled into a confused volume of sound. The claque could rest; it had done its work for the present. All the pit had needed was guidance and to

be told what it wanted. It now clamoured with one voice for the return of its idol.

When this had gone on for some minutes Ettrick appeared. There was a howl of satisfaction and then silence. He stood and addressed the house. He was carrying his violin.

"I will ask you," he said, "to let the concert proceed according to the programme. A lady, Miss Windle, from the first class, will now play you a pianoforte solo."

"We don't want the first class," a voice replied. "We want you. Give us another tune on your fiddle."

"But this isn't a one-man show," Ettrick protested. "I'm only a detail of it—a minor detail."

"You're *it*."

"You're IT!" the pit began to bellow. "We want you. Strike up!"

Ettrick made a grimace at the stars, that was like a humorous appeal to the gods on high. What could a poor fiddler do against an audience that would not take no for an answer? He raised his violin, and again there was a howl and silence.

He was in his comic vein. He was playing a jig, with artful variations: his feet shuffled to it; his head rolled whimsically. It seemed as if his feet were moving in spite of him. They stopped, and the next moment were off again. They were capering uncontrolled when the music ceased.

The applause was terrific.

The violinist's face glistened with sweat. He wiped it with a handkerchief that matched his cummerbund.

"Take a rest," somebody shouted. "Sit on the music-stool."

In the stalls a gentleman rose. It was Mr. Amersham. Sit on the music-stool ! Not merely take Miss Windle's turn, but desecrate the seat where she should have been sitting. *Her* seat, in fact ! Sit where—— Bristling, he made his way to the back of the stage.

Others rose. This was too much of a good thing. They had come to listen to a concert, given by their own kind ; not to the howls of a mob and the fiddling of one man. In a moment the whole of the stalls was following Mr. Amersham's example. The pit cheered.

From the promenade deck also people were withdrawing. Sale showed himself between the curtains and caught Ettrick's attention. Ettrick hastened to him.

The pit kept quiet during the brief colloquy, of which nothing could be heard.

Sale retired again, and Ettrick tripped to the footlights.

" Ladies and gentlemen," he said : " the first class have decided to postpone their concert and to hold it in their own part of the ship. If you like I will try to amuse you for the next hour."

There was a savage triumphant roar.

He gave them patter, he played them tunes, he told them stories, and everything he did delighted them. At last he struck up the national anthem The audience sang it lustily, but, as soon as it was ended, a voice from the background called : " Now give us the ' Red Flag.' "

Another voice seconded the demand, and a clamour got up for the " Red Flag." It was not general but it was very noisy and it persisted, and it gathered

force by its persistence. Even people who had bawled "'God Save the King'" were now bawling for the "Red Flag."

With again that humorous gesture of yielding to the inevitable, Ettrick obeyed the demand, and the revolutionary hymn was sung by a score of voices that had the strength of a hundred.

The audience then dispersed, and the bar filled.

A few had kept their seats on the promenade deck and witnessed the later proceedings. The captain and Major Pageant were among those who had stayed.

"What do you think of it all?" inquired the major.

"Well," answered the captain, "it's a fiasco for which I feel that I'm to blame. I shouldn't have suggested that the concert should be held on the after well-deck. I shall have to apologise to the promoters.

"But—isn't it a rather queer affair altogether?" said the major. "Do your steerage passengers often sing the 'Red Flag'?"

"Oh, that," replied the captain airily, "is not a matter I attach very much importance to. Singing the 'Red Flag' is merely a way of letting off steam. Barking dogs seldom bite, and the people who sing revolutionary songs aren't the ones who make the revolutions. What annoys me is that the concert should have been a fiasco and that I should have been the cause of it."

"I was watching a group at the back," the major remarked. "That tall, somewhat truculent-looking Australian who came aboard at Fremantle was a member of it. It's a funny thing, I seem to recall his face, but I've never been able to place him. Well,

he and his friends at the back were the start and the finish of the whole affair. I feel sure that the trouble was engineered and that that man was the ringleader."

"Very possibly. For my part, I'd rather suspect the fiddler. I know he's an agitator. He appeared to be the innocent victim of circumstances to-night, but it struck me that he was enjoying himself. Anyhow, they've blown off steam, and that ought to do them good. . . . Going? . . . Well, I must go too."

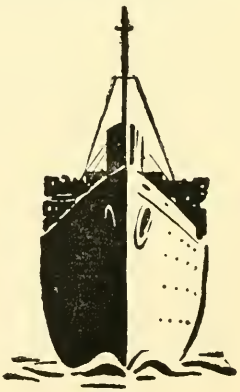
The captain had steam to blow off, a considerable head of it. He sent for the purser, who had for some time past been expecting the summons.

Major Pageant was waylaid by two young persons.

"Oh, Major Pageant," said one of them eagerly, "*do* you think there's any danger of those men seizing the ship and making us walk the plank?"

"How ridiculous you are, Marjorie," said the other, before the major could answer; "why, even if there were, and of course there isn't, the major is equal to a hundred of them."

"Call it a thousand," replied the major, in the lightest tone he had at his command.



CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

THE CAPTAIN WAS CRITICISED FOR WHAT MRS. BYWAY called his "supine inaction" at the concert; but, as others said, what could the poor man do? He was not a regulator of manners, and bad manners was the extent to which the affair had gone. His initial mistake had been his only one, and that mistake was excusable.

The heat continued to be intense. To lay one's hand on woodwork was to make one think that the sky had become a burning-glass and that the ship was already kindling.

Two days passed. In the evening of the second day the usual crowd was gathered in the third-class bar. The consumption of beer had increased. An incredible number of "empties" had been carried away from this end of the ship in the morning, and to-day's score promised to be a record.

There was little conversation among the drinkers, and the atmosphere seemed to be charged with more than the day's heat. Tempers lately had grown explosive. Yesterday a man had thrown a glass of beer in another's face for jogging his arm accidentally while he was drinking. There had been a fight, and blood had flown. To-day there had been more

bloodshed, through a customer being served out o his turn. Men were not only feeling the heat and feeling the liquor, but they were feeling the strain of one another's company : the same faces, the same voices, the same gestures every day, and no escape from them.

O'Malley had just had his glass filled. He sat and glowered at it.

" Rot-gut," he said. " Rot-gut—that's all it is. Slow poison, and the more you have of it the more you want. God, I'd give something for a whisky ! "

" Plenty of whisky in the first class," said Ettrick. " Why don't you blow into the saloon bar and call for a whisky-and-soda ? "

" Bright hope I'd have of getting it, wouldn't I ? " O'Malley grunted.

" You might. You never know your luck. If I wanted whisky as badly as you do, I'd demand it."

" For two pins I would."

Ettrick rose.

" Who's got two pins ? " he called out. " For two pins O'Malley would go up to the saloon bar and demand a whisky."

" Belaying-pins do ? " inquired somebody. " They'd be the best to take with him."

" It's too warm for jokes," answered O'Malley. " Keep 'em for the cooler weather. You didn't raise a laugh," he said to Ettrick. " This isn't the time to be funny."

" I wanted to raise the pins," replied Ettrick good-humouredly. He was one of the few whom the weather did not appear to affect ; it did not make him drink the more or talk the less. He was in good spirits, feeling pleased and proud. Since the night of the

concert he had noticed the captain and others eyeing him thoughtfully. They had seen through his play, of course, as he had meant them to do ; they were nervous of him, anxious about what he might be up to next. He had created the impression that he loved to create—of a man to be reckoned with, a subtle fellow, a leader of men. But he wished to confirm that impression, which was not strong enough yet. Success had gone to his head, so that he craved for more.

He had a purpose now in teasing O'Malley.

" Do you want a lead ? " he resumed. " I'll give you a lead if you want one."

" Stow it," said O'Malley.

" Oh, all right. I didn't mean to rile you. I was only thinking you mightn't care about breasting the bar alone—be kind of bashful about barging in among the swells."

O'Malley fired up. " Do you think I'm afraid of that scabby lot ? By cripes, I bet I've drunk whisky with as many swells as you have. I don't want your lead. I've led better men than you before to-day." He lurched to his feet. " I *will* go and call for a whisky, damn me if I don't, and I'll smash the bloody bar up if I don't get it ! "

His face was inflamed, but his step, once he had started, was fairly steady.

" Who's he going to murder—the captain ? " a bystander asked. The barman craned his head out of the serving-hatch. He had had a fleeting glimpse of O'Malley's countenance.

Ettrick ran after his friend and caught him when he was half-way across the well-deck.

"Hold on, old man," he said. "I know a trick worth two of that."

O'Malley paused uncertainly. He seemed in doubt whether to listen or to fling Ettrick off. Habit prevailed: he had never yet refused to listen to Ettrick.

"What's up now?" he demanded. "What's the game this time? I want a whisky."

"You'll get one, if you're patient," answered Ettrick. "You haven't a hope of being served if you go up there. You're a third-class passenger, recollect. Dirt! You can smash up the bar, but what good will that do you? You'll be grabbed and put in irons."

"Well, what did you want to suggest it for?" O'Malley growled.

"I never thought you'd take me seriously. Now, look here: you aren't the only one that wants whisky, and the more there are that ask for it, the better chance of getting it; and not one measly whisky, but whisky served for the rest of the voyage in our bar. But it's the captain you've got to ask."

"Well, haven't we asked the captain? Didn't you ask him?" O'Malley said impatiently. "If that's your scheme——"

"You can't see what's as plain as the nose on your face," Ettrick broke in. "When did we ask him? Ten days or more ago. *Before the concert*, anyway—when the captain didn't care a damn for us—just a lousy lot of third-class passengers. *Before* the concert. *Before we gave 'em the 'Red Flag.'*"

"You mean we scared him?" It had taken O'Malley a moment to catch Ettrick's meaning.

"Of course we scared him—with the 'Red Flag' and all the rest of the business. He can see trouble

sticking out, if we aren't handled gently. You take it from me, he'd give us whisky or anything else we asked for now, to keep us quiet. *He* doesn't want trouble It doesn't suit his book. . . . Come on, we'll go back and muster the boys and go in a body to the captain. You leave it to me ; I'll do the palavering."

O'Malley consented to return.

The purser, talking to Straker on the promenade deck, had been an observer of this scene. He was standing, while Straker was seated with his back to the well-deck and with Miss Lablanche beside him.

" There's something brewing," said the purser, half to himself, as the pair returned to the bar.

Straker turned and caught a glimpse of their retreating figures, dark in the light of the doorway. The well-deck was poorly illuminated.

" Not another concert, I trust," said Straker.

" I hope not. If there is, I shan't meddle with it."

Straker laughed. " You've had your lesson."

They continued to talk for some minutes, Miss Lablanche keeping out of the conversation.

Then the bar began to emit a stream of men.

Ettrick was at their head, and he led them straight for the steps to the promenade deck.

" Excuse me a minute," said the purser quickly, and pattered down the stairs. He met Ettrick at the bottom and blocked the way.

" Hullo," he said. " Are you looking for somebody ? "

" We want to see the captain," answered Ettrick, in the voice of one whose wishes command respect. The men gathered round him.

" The captain is engaged at this moment, I happen to know. What is it you wish to see him about? Anything important? "

" Yes," O'Malley thrust in. " Very important. We want whisky, and we want it now."

The sentiment was echoed.

" Now leave this to me," said Ettrick. " You can't all be spokesman, and you've asked me to speak for you. If you want to shove your oars in, I'll pull mine out." He waited for silence, which came. " It's true," he went on, to the purser, " that we wish to see the captain immediately about the matter of having whisky served in the third-class bar. If you'll kindly let us pass, we'll go and look for him."

" But you won't find him," declared the purser. " He's engaged, I tell you."

" We *will* find him," said O'Malley. More voices broke in, and feet began to shuffle.

" I doubt if I can hold these men," said Ettrick in a stage whisper. " Be quiet, please," he said aloud.

" Well, look here," said the purser. " I don't think it's the slightest good your seeing the captain, but if you insist, I'll go and ask him if he will see you. In the meantime you must stay here. You can't run all over the ship looking for the captain, you know, and you won't find him any the sooner by doing so. He'll probably see you almost immediately if I tell him that your business is urgent. Now, will you stop at the foot of this ladder for five minutes? "

" Very well," said Ettrick, before anyone else could speak. " This, you understand, is a deputation, and

we desire to conduct our business in a perfectly orderly manner."

The purser did not stay to hear any comments, of which there was soon a rapid fire. It was clear that the men were displeased at the unexpected delay, and particularly at having to kick their heels at the foot of a ladder which led to the first-class quarters. Ettrick did his best to pacify them. Having set the torch to O'Malley, who was to ignite the others and save him from the charge of incendiarism, he now found himself hard put to it to control the flames. He had moments of slight anxiety. He wanted obedient followers, not an uproarious rabble. O'Malley's tone was violent, and his example spread.

"If you're going to make a shindy," said Ettrick, "I'll retire and leave you to it; and you'll see what you'll get."

That produced a temporary lull. Then O'Malley's voice was heard again. His language was rich.

"These men seem rather excited," remarked Straker. "Perhaps we'd better move—eh?"

"Why?" his companion asked. "Do you think I am afraid?"

"Well, not exactly that," said Straker, at a loss for once.

"I have never been afraid of men," said Miss Lablanche.

"Then let us stay. I would rather. One of them has a wonderful gift of speech. I'm learning some entirely new expressions from him."

At that moment the purser was seen returning.

The captain had not been engaged, and the purser had no reason to believe that he was. He had

found his commanding officer, without difficulty, at the forward end of the promenade deck. Major Pageant was with him.

"Send Mr. New to me," said the captain, when he had heard all that the purser had to say; and the purser had a good deal to say. "You'll find him on the bridge; and come back with him, please."

He spoke to Major Pageant when the purser had gone.

"Mr. New," he said to the chief officer as that gentleman presented himself. "There's a possibility of trouble with some of the steerage passengers. Have the force-pump down there manned and ready, and stand by with the hose. Don't show yourselves or come up with it until I call you. I'm going to interview the men just over there." He pointed. "If I call you, run the hose up smartly and play it on them. And—Mr. New—pick the likeliest men."

"The likeliest men, sir?" queried the chief officer, thinking that the captain was still speaking of the men on whom the hose might have to be played.

"The most reliable hands among the watch," replied the captain; and Mr. New ran down to the forward well-deck.

"You can bring the deputation to me now," the captain told the purser. "By the time they've had their say and I've had mine, Mr. New ought to be ready for them, if they're bent on trouble. After you've brought them to me, get the passengers on the port side out of the way. You can merely say that I wish that part of the deck to be clear for a while. . . . You stay, major, if you like. I don't want *you* out of the way; and we needn't get wet if we're careful."

They walked together to the port side and took their stand at the corner of the deck-house, which was a few yards from the companion-ladder.

The major was outwardly tranquil and inwardly agitated. There was going to be a ruction—he could feel it in his bones—and he was in for it.

"If we stand here," said the captain, "we can step back quickly, if necessary, and be out of the line of fire."

"Just so," said the major carelessly.

The brilliant length of deck showed many passengers, sitting or standing or strolling, and the purser's receding back, which gleamed like snow in the sun. He reached the steps and halted, pointed to where the captain was, then moved aside to let the deputation pass.

It came in single file, a slightly swaying line, which gradually broke up and formed a bunch. Ettrick, walking briskly, managed to keep the lead. The purser followed slowly, speaking to passengers.

"Twenty-one of them, I think," observed the captain. "A fair-sized deputation."

It drew up in an irregular body in front of him.

"Well, men," he said, "what's the trouble?"

"We're very sorry to trouble you at all, captain," answered Ettrick suavely, "but there's an urgent demand for whisky in our part of the ship; we have the money to pay for it; and the feeling is very strong that we ought to get it. I'm aware that you've heard something like that before, but the demand is much more pressing now. But for that I shouldn't have brought this deputation to you."

"I'm very sorry," the captain replied, "but I've

only the same answer to make that I made before. It's not in my power to allow whisky to be sold in the third-class bar. I'm simply a servant of the Company, and I have to carry out orders. On this point the Company's orders are definite. No spirits to be served aft. Now, we shall be at Port Said in a day or two and although I can't recommend the whisky there, you'll be able to get all you want of it. Ten days later you'll be in England. I sympathise with you—I like a glass of whisky sometimes myself—but you've made more than two-thirds of the voyage now, and I think you ought to be able to hold out for the remainder. As you know, I've met you on several small points, and I should be only too happy to make any other concessions in my power, for your greater comfort and enjoyment ; but it's no use, no use whatever, to ask me for whisky."

During this rather long speech, one of the deputation, attracted by sounds perhaps, had wandered over to the forward rail. He came back and spoke to O'Malley just as the captain finished.

"But you have discretionary power, captain," Ettrick was beginning, when O'Malley raised a shout : "They're getting the fire-hose ready for us !"

Instantly there was tumult. Led by O'Malley, the men moved confusedly towards the companion-ladder. Ettrick in vain tried to hold them. The captain shouted : "Look out, Mr. New !" and was forced back by the press of men. They did not pass him ; they formed a solid block between him and the forward well-deck, for O'Malley had found the way obstructed. The major, by a very rapid movement, had reached the steps before him. Below, the chief

officer and his men were struggling with a pump which was obstinately refusing duty.

O'Malley had a sheath-knife drawn. Those near him had heard him announce his intention of cutting the hose, and add something about a hose he had cut in Cairo.

"Out of my road," he said to the major. "I've ripped up better men than you."

"Hold hard," the major answered, standing his ground. "You wouldn't rip *me* up, would you? You wouldn't rip up one of the old 29th?"

"What the hell—— Where the hell have I met you before?" O'Malley lowered the knife.

"Think back to the Abbassieh Palace hospital in Alexandria. I only recognised you a minute ago. How are you?"

"Strike me fours left!" exclaimed O'Malley. "My opposite number! . . . Hi! stop pushing, you bastards. Here's one of the old 29th Division" He put up his knife. "Give us your hand, major. Why, I'd clean forgotten your name, or I'd have known you again."

"I doubt if you ever knew my name," said the major. "We were only a few days together, you know. Any more old Anzacs among this crowd?"

"Three or four. Well! damn my tripes! Step to the front, the Anzacs," O'Malley bawled, "and meet one of the old 29th! We never scrapped with the old 29th and we never will. The best bloody division in the British Army—our first pals and our last!"

Several men pushed their way to O'Malley's side, and the major's hand was severely shaken. The

captain too had arrived. He looked profoundly bewildered.

"It's all right," said the major. "The trouble's over. This is a friend of mine. We're all friends."

The pump was at last ready for action, and the chief officer was standing by with the hose.

"Look here," said the captain loudly, "if you men are willing to go away quietly, I'll overlook this rumpus—and I'll send you a couple of bottles from my own store, to drink the major's health in. That's the most I can do for you. No—whisky—will be served—in the third-class bar. Do you get that, all of you?"

"The captain *can't* do it. Don't you understand?" added the major. "He can't break standing orders."

"'Nough said," replied O'Malley. "We take your word, captain, and we'll drink your health in your whisky, along with the major's. Where's Ettrick? What's he got to say?"

There was no answer. There was no Ettrick. At least not in this part of the ship. He had retired to his own quarters; and his retirement had strongly resembled flight. When O'Malley drew his knife, that had been enough for him.

There were ironical calls for Ettrick when the truth was divined.

"Well," pronounced O'Malley, as the men began to withdraw, "I don't like a mate who shows his tail to me—eh, old 29th?"

Thus ended the reign of Ettrick—the man who was not quite an artist nor quite a man of action.

"I'm coming down to have a drink with you," said the major. "Expect me with the whisky."

The captain and the chief officer had exchanged some words. When O'Malley, after another handshake, had gone, the captain took the major aside.

"Did that man draw a knife on you?" he asked.

"Certainly not," answered the major.

"Oh, well, I'm very glad." The captain seemed glad. "New thought he saw a knife in his hand. I couldn't have overlooked that."'

"I'm positive that he didn't draw a knife on me. If he had, I couldn't have helped noticing it," the major laughed.

"No—no. Of course. Well, you've done a good evening's work, major. A damned good evening's work. I don't know how you managed it. You must tell me afterwards. But I don't mind telling you that you saved what might have developed into a very ugly business—a *very* ugly business. You know, in these days of Bolshevik propaganda, a shipmaster can't always rely on his crew when it comes to setting them on to their fellow-workers; and I wasn't at all sure of my men. New has a strong suspicion that the pump was tampered with. God knows what would have been the upshot if that lot had got on the rampage."

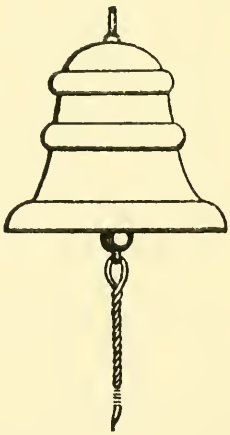
"I'm pleased to have been of service," said the major simply. "It was purely due to my good luck in remembering where I'd met that fellow. He was an Australian officer, promoted on the field for gallantry."

"There was more than good luck in it," replied the captain. "You can't put it off like that. But you did what one might have expected you to do. I must go and send them their whisky now."

The major added a bottle to the captain's two, and his health was drunk with musical honours.

He went to bed with a great load lifted from him. This was perhaps the happiest hour of his life. His call had come and he had answered it—not as when he had insanely charged the German trench, but coolly—unequivocally. He knew himself now, and what to expect of that hitherto dubious personage. He might be timid, but he was master of his timidity. He might even be a coward, but he was master of his cowardice. In any emergency he would act in a manner becoming to him. A prey to fear he would always be, but never again a prey to fear of himself.

In that confidence the major's spirit found ease at last, an ease which was that of Elysium.



CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

THE RED SEA HAD CLOSED IN TO ITS APEX, TO THOSE desolate and barren and fantastic hills, sharp-cut and strangely dyed, beautiful and terrible, which may be like the mountains of the moon but are like no other hills on earth. Sprawling Port Suez had lingered for an hour in the middle distance before the *Dido* started to cross the desert. That was what she appeared to be doing, for the Canal had less the semblance of a great waterway than of a ditch, compared with the vast distances on either hand. And everywhere the desert was trying to choke the ditch, and men were holding the desert back.

" One year of anarchy," said Straker, " and there'd be no more Suez Canal."

He had just come up from lunch and joined the major, who was standing beside the port rail.

" I can never look at this canal," continued Straker, " without thinking of Disraeli. What a stroke that was of his in buying those Canal shares. And so unlike the action of a politician. Politicians and other leaders of the mob have the limited vision of the mob. Usually they can't see a day ahead of them. Genius in public life is rare because the crowd objects to being

led by men of genius. To lead the mob you must be one of the mob."

"What about Napoleon?" said the major.

"The force of Napoleon's genius smashed all rules," answered Straker. "Generally, the crowd prefers its leaders to be made after its own image. Aspirations not inspirations, are what it requires of its statesmen; and that's why Disraeli's inspiration, which was not after all so very astonishing, impresses us. We are amazed to find a statesman showing any foresight."

The major laughed. That quiet smile of his was less to be seen now. He laughed quite frankly and easily.

"By the way," said Straker, "talking of inspirations, that was a genuine inspiration of yours the other night. Tell me how it came to you, will you? I'm most curious to know. It would never have come to me in a thousand years. Even if I had been in your place and the facts had been identical, it would never have occurred to me that your reminder would have any effect at all on such a man in such a situation."

"Well," replied the major, "I can't claim any credit for it at all. It wasn't my inspiration."

"Not yours?"

"No. It was the inspiration of a non-commissioned officer in 1917. He was the sergeant-major of my battalion. The Australians, as you know, were admirable troops, but their camp discipline wasn't perfect, and they got out of hand sometimes. You must bear in mind, in connection with this anecdote, that the 29th Division, to which I had the honour of belonging, had intimate relations with the Anzacs when they were first blooded. They liked us and respected us, and when the Australian likes you and respects you he's a

damned good friend. We were their elder brothers in war, I think that's what the feeling was, and I doubt if they had it for any other body of troops.

"Well, they were lying near us when they broke loose one day. It was in France. They'd come on a cache of wine, I think: anyhow, some hundreds of them got blind drunk and started on the war-path. There'd been a little trouble between a few of our men and a few of theirs, and this decided them to take it out of us. An ordinary barney wouldn't have mattered much, but unhappily they brought their rifles and bayonets with them. When I and some other officers came on the scene, they had their bayonets fixed; they were simply begging for fight—perfectly mad, you know—and it looked really as if there was going to be slaughter. The case needed instant treatment, but none of us knew what to do: any attempt to place them under arrest would merely have hastened the catastrophe. In fact they couldn't have been arrested, in the state they were in; we should have had to shoot them down. And they might, very likely, have shot us down instead.

"It was then that the sergeant-major had his inspiration. He went up to them, and "Boys," he said, "you wouldn't fight with the old 29th Division, would you?"

"The effect was instantaneous. It may sound incredible to you, but in less than a minute they were shaking hands with us and stammering heart-felt apologies. Of course, they'd known from the beginning that we did belong to the 29th, but it just needed the sergeant-major's words to remind them of the old times and the bond between us. Well, I 'placed' that

fellow O'Malley when I heard him say something about Cairo and the way they'd dealt with a hose that the Red Caps—the military police—had turned on them there ; and at the same moment I remembered our sergeant-major's words. I just had time to get to the head of the steps before him ; and that's all there is about the affair."

"It's plenty," observed Straker admiringly. "If I say any more, I shall make you feel uncomfortable. You're so exceedingly modest, major."

"I don't think so," replied the major. "I think that *excessive* modesty proceeds more often than not from self-distrust. It's a morbid state of the mind. I had it once. I believe I've quite got over it."

Straker looked at him rather closely and said nothing.

Soon they separated. Miss Lablanche was alone on the seat which Straker favoured, and he went to her. Miss Lablanche did not weary him with her company ; but it was not often lacking when he desired it. It was lacking just often enough. The voyage had begun to bore him : he was approaching that stage, known to most world-travellers, when the extinction of all his shipmates would not have troubled him : and he found her comments on things and people refreshing. Furthermore, Miss Lablanche was an excellent listener, although he was hardly aware of that. She, for her part, did not feel that she was imperilling the integrity of her holiday by being agreeable to Straker, who was not quite as other men.

The evening of a day the coolest for many days brought the *Dido* to Port Said. The desert journey

was interesting : the eye and the mind had been given the food they wanted ; and the social air was clearer for the eclipse of Ettrick. Moreover, here again were fellow-humans : the *Dido* was ceasing to be a microcosm and becoming again a part of the great, familiar world.

Port Said that night, from the anchorage, was like a glittering water pageant : a composition of which the ingredients were the lighted front, the lighted boats, the black water, raucous voices, predatory faces and fancy dresses. The whole made a bizarre and entrancing blend—entrancing if one preserved a complete detachment from it and viewed it as a stage spectacle. The foolish went ashore, and another illusion was shattered. In the morning came the " gilly-gilly " man, with his chicks that laid undeniable eggs, and a host of plausible robbers and other beasts of prey who clung to the ship till her screws were turning. Then at last the Mediterranean. There were Naples and Marseilles and Gibraltar to come, but one felt that one was on the last lap.

Mr. and Mrs. Maule had said good-bye to the ship and to Mrs. Godsett, and there were many new passengers, mostly French. The invasion was mainly in the first class, and the British prepared to be civil and condescending to these new-comers. They were too many for comfort, and the British, having travelled so many thousand miles, regarded the ship as theirs ; but there were proprieties to be remembered.

" We must treat them as guests," said Mrs. Byway, " as this is an English ship, and it has been our home for a month. At the same time we need not resign our rights of priority."

That, and especially the last clause, expressed the general feeling pretty accurately. Unfortunately it did not seem to occur to the French that the English had any rights of priority, or that priority had any rights. The position, as they saw it, appeared to be that, having paid their fare, they had a right to as much as they could get for it. A base, commercial way of looking at the matter. They rose early, from habit, breakfasted early, and at once took possession of the best places on deck. Straker found himself evicted from his bench, and Mr. Amersham was annoyed to discover a stout couple in the spot where he sat with Miss Windle. He explained in his best French that he was accustomed to sit here, and the Frenchman had the impudence to reply in English that the chairs they were sitting on belonged to them, and the deck, he understood, was public ground. The argument was as shameless as it was unanswerable and Mr. Amersham retired, boiling with anger.

By noon the English and French were not on speaking terms.

" Can one wonder," said Mr. Amersham to Straker at dinner, " that the *entente* is constantly threatened? How is it possible to be friendly with people so arrogant, selfish and ill-mannered—so disregardful of just claims? The service is awful now," he added. " I don't see why you and I should be kept waiting. That Frenchman is at his sweets. Look ! "

" The trouble is," said Straker, " that each race has an absolute confidence in its own unchallengeable superiority to all other races in the world. ' Arrogant, selfish and ill-mannered '—isn't that exactly what they say of us ? "

" I'm sure I don't know," Mr. Amersham replied, " and I don't care. But whenever we try to be civil to them, they give us a back-hander."

" It's a sad fact," mused Straker, " that the more the English and French see of each other the less they like each other. They're essentially antagonistic, antipathetic. Unless mutual interest holds them together, they quarrel the moment they have any close relations. They have no genuine respect for and no understanding of each other. And yet the most popular novelist—not English novelist—in France is said to be Dickens. The inconsistencies of the human mind are indeed staggering."

" Thank Heaven," Mr. Amersham ejaculated, " we shall lose them all at Marseilles."

At Naples the ship very nearly lost him and Miss Windle. They scuttled aboard when the gangway was about to be cast off, and both had a very bright colour, due to their haste, possibly, and the many smiling eyes that were bent upon them. They escaped as soon as they could from the public gaze, and nothing was seen of them till dinner-time.

Before he went to bed Mr. Amersham made this entry in his diary :

" ' See Naples and die,' it has been said. Well, I have seen Naples, but ' See Naples and live ' would suit my case better. It seems to me that until now I have never lived ; or, to speak without hyperbole, that I live anew and am, as it were, young again. Never shall I forget this queen of cities, where Joyce said the word that has made me the happiest of men. It will be for ever a glowing and fragrant memory." (" Fragrant," Mr. Amersham noticed, was not perhaps

the most appropriate word here, but he was speaking figuratively, and he let it stand.) " How anyone can declare that the best part of Naples is the bay, passes my comprehension. It is the one perfectly beautiful city I have seen, and fitter for gods than for mortals. Of course, those who look for smells will find them, but those who look for smells have smelly minds.

" Thank God for Joyce and Naples ! I can scarcely contain myself."

On this ecstatic note the entry closed, and the book was shut and locked away.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

MANY FIRST-CLASS PASSENGERS, BESIDES THE FRENCH, were to leave the ship at Marseilles, and a farewell ball had been arranged for the night before. It took place in fine weather, and the two nations met without clashing, if they did not mix to any extent.

Vera Fleetwood and Anthone were among those who danced. Fleetwood was a looker-on. He had never been a dancing-man.

"Do you mind if we sit this one out?" Vera said to Anthone, before their second dance. "I should rather like to cool."

"I was going to suggest it," he replied; and they went to the promenade deck.

"Isn't it rather too cool for you here?" he said, looking at her glistening shoulders and arms. "If you're hot, you might catch cold, you know."

"It's very nice," said Vera. "Clothes are such a burden sometimes, however few they are. But perhaps I'd better put something over my shoulders. Let's walk along to my cabin, and I'll get a wrap."

Others had come up for fresh air, but the end of the deck was empty. Vera went into her cabin, and came from it draped in a white silk shawl embroidered with coloured flowers.

"That's a lovely thing," said Anthone. "How much more beautiful women's clothes are than they used to be. It suits you admirably too."

She drew it closely about her, and stood for him to admire it—and her, it may be.

"You're brilliant—dazzling—in it," he said.

"How can I be," said Vera, "when I'm dark? It's the shawl that's brilliant and dazzling."

"You don't require to be fair to be brilliant and dazzling," he answered. "Did you never see a black opal?"

"Am I like a black opal?" she asked. "A black opal is fiery. Do you think I'm fiery?"

"Aren't you?"

"I don't know. . . . But we're starting to talk nonsense. Are you going ashore to-morrow?"

"I am," he said, and seemed about to add something, but she went on rather quickly:

"We shall be a smaller family by to-morrow night, and I don't know that I shall be sorry, though I shall miss some of them. Straker," she laughed. "He was going all the way by sea at first, you know, but he changed his mind lately." This was not true but it was the current story. She mentioned other people.

"And I," said Anthone.

"You!" she exclaimed. "But you didn't tell me!"

They had been leaning back on the rail, and her body straightened. She was looking at him in astonishment and reproach. Why had he not told her?

"I was going to tell you before we went below again," said Anthone. "In fact I was going to tell you a minute ago, but you went on too quickly for me.

I decided this afternoon to leave at Marseilles. I notified the purser, and I'm packed and ready."

"Well," she said, "seeing that we've been—friends—I think you might have told me a little earlier."

"Do you care?"

"It's such a surprise."

"I had no opportunity to tell you until this evening," he said. "I thought of it while we were dancing, and then—I don't know—I thought I'd wait. It didn't seem to me to be a matter of great importance—to you. What am I to you? Just a passing acquaintance."

"I thought we'd been friends. An acquaintance is just somebody you know and have to be polite to. But of course——" She did not finish.

"How did you come to make up your mind so suddenly?" she asked, as he made no further remark.

"I didn't make up my mind suddenly. I was a good while making it up."

"And you said nothing. I didn't think you were so secretive."

"I don't think I am as a rule."

"You were too polite to tell me that the voyage was boring you," Vera said with a smile, though she was not smiling inwardly. She was hurt, and she was disappointed, and she had a sense of loss. To lose Anthone now was quite different from losing him at Southampton. This was premature; the other would have come as a natural and inevitable event—like death in old age or the end of a story.

"The voyage wasn't boring me," he replied. "It couldn't bore me with you on board." He was speaking with a rather pronounced composure. "The reason why I decided to leave at Marseilles, and why

I said nothing to you about it while I was making up my mind, was that I'd grown dangerously fond of you, and I felt that I couldn't trust myself very much longer. It seemed to me, too, that you were not altogether indifferent to me, and well—I like to play the game, when it's possible. It's very unfashionable, I know, but I suppose I've inherited a few old-fashioned ideas. You'll probably think me very ridiculous, and tell me that I needn't have bothered. I dare say not. I expect the truth is that I'm running away for my own sake."

"I'd no idea you cared so much as that," said Vera in a voice that she hardly knew. "I cared too, of course. Perhaps you're right. Perhaps it's time you went."

Anthone had forgotten, or he had not yet learned, that temptation is never more formidable than when we have gained a victory over it.

"Do you care?" he asked.

"You know I do." The words came indistinctly to him.

His arms went suddenly out to her and about her.

"I love you, body and soul," he said.

She was passive at first under his kisses. Soon she was returning them.

His embrace tightened. She raised her hands to his shoulders: she clasped his neck. He was crushing her and hurting her, and the pain was exquisite. Never had she known such ravishment. But all at once she thought of Larry.

"Stop—stop—Miles." His name came readily to her lips, though she had never spoken it aloud before. She had learned it from the book of poems he had lent

her. For weeks they had used no names in addressing each other. "Let me go, please! That's quite enough."

He kissed her almost savagely, and released her.

"You know now what I feel for you," he then said. "The decision is in your hands. I leave it to you."

"I can't leave Larry," she replied, quickly comprehending him.

"That was what I expected. And I wouldn't ask you to do anything but that."

"That was what *I* expected," said Vera: but she deceived herself; she had had no expectations. She had had qualms of conscience, apprehensions, and mingled relief and regret when he had released her. But what he had said just now had struck her at once as the only right and possible thing. Sanity had returned, a little dishevelled, after that minute of glorious madness.

They found that they had much to talk about.

Fleetwood was sitting by the door through which Vera had passed, with a smile and a word to him when she had left the saloon with Anthone. He was listening, without pleasure, to the throbbing, heady music, primitive yet sophisticated, modern yet as old as the crude desires of man. He disliked jazz at any time: to-night it was particularly offensive to him: it seemed to stand for all that he was not; for all that he could not be. Its manifest appeal to the people about him gave him the sense of being alone in an alien world, a world that was latently hostile to him. If this was the modern spirit, he was pretty old, he thought.

He would not have stayed to be annoyed by the music, but he was waiting for Vera to return. She had been gone a damned long time : people must be noticing her absence ; commenting, very probably. As minute after minute passed and she did not appear, his nerves began to tweak him and make all kinds of suggestions. Every person who smiled in his direction was smiling in private amusement at him.

Young Swift, the Rhodes scholar, was coming over to him ; and he had a smile on his face, an open smile.

" I've lost my partner," he said—" my partner that was to have been. Do you happen to know where I'm likely to find Mrs. Fleetwood ? "

" Yes," said Fleetwood, getting up. " She went on deck. I'll find her for you in a minute. She must have forgotten."

" Oh, don't trouble," said Swift. " I can find her, perhaps."

" It's no trouble," answered Fleetwood. " I was going on deck, anyhow. You stay here."

He could not have sat in that chair another minute.

He went quickly up the shallow steps of the staircase and emerged on the promenade deck. Here he turned in the same direction as Vera and Anthone had taken. Had he turned in the other and walked round the after end of the deck, he would have met them, for they were on the point of returning when he came on them. They were still by the rail. Opposite was the door of his and Vera's cabin.

Instantly Fleetwood recalled the night when he had found her in bed and she had told him that Anthone was on the forecastle ; and the question that then had gripped him : where had they said good

night? *outside* the cabin, which Anthone would have to pass, or—*where?*

They went to meet him. "Were you looking for us?" said Vera.

"I was looking for *you*," replied Fleetwood. "Swift is looking for you too. You were engaged to dance with him."

"I know," she said. "I'm awfully sorry. I quite forgot all about it."

"I'm afraid it was my fault," said Anthone, whom Fleetwood was ignoring. "I got on a hobby of mine, the ancient Mediterranean, and it ran away with me."

The excuse rang rather thinly, but he was embarrassed by Fleetwood's disregard of him, and by something in Fleetwood's aspect.

The natural next step would have seemed to be for the three of them to return together, but Fleetwood did not move.

"Are you coming back?" said Vera to him.

"Wait one minute," he answered.

"Well, I must be going back," said Anthone, seeing that he was dismissed.

"What have you been doing?" said Fleetwood coldly as Anthone retired.

Vera's eyes met his and waved at the remembrance. "Doing?" she repeated.

"Yes. Why do I find you here—outside our cabin door?"

She understood him then, and her eyes wavered no longer. They hardened, and their pupils contracted.

"What do you imagine I have been doing?" she asked.

" You answer my questions with questions," he said contemptuously.

" I see no reason why I should answer them at all," she replied, " seeing that you've evidently made up your mind about what I have been doing."

" If you don't answer me," said Fleetwood, " I shall take it that you admit—what I have suggested."

" Do so."

" Then nothing more remains but to make an end of our marriage." As he said this Fleetwood's tone became more normal. He knew the worst, and calm was following the climax. No climax, however disastrous, after long suspense, is without its sequel of calm. " All I ask," he continued, " is that you keep this private until we are ashore. It may be weakness on my part, but I dislike being made the subject of scandalous gossip—especially among people who have been my fellow-passengers for five weeks. We cease to be husband and wife, of course, from this minute, but if you can suffer my company for the remaining week, I shall be very much obliged to you. And, if you don't mind, let there be no more—of what has just passed."

" Anthone is leaving the boat to-morrow," she answered ; " so there will be no more of—what has just passed."

" Oh, is he ? I didn't know that." He was surprised. Leaving the boat to-morrow. That was a bit strange, when he might have gone to Southampton with them.

" Is that all you have to say for the present ? " she asked.

" I believe so. You will see Anthone, of course. There's no need for me to speak to him. I'm assuming——"

"Assuming," said Vera, as he paused, "that Anthone will accept the responsibility of me. I think you may, Larry."

"That was what I thought. From the little I've seen of him, I should say he is a very decent fellow," said Fleetwood in his most dispassionate manner. "Well, if you're going back to the saloon, I'll walk as far as the entrance with you." And they set off.

Vera had difficulty in realising that anything serious had happened. She re-entered the saloon, met Swift, apologised to him, and promised him another dance. Then she saw Anthone coming up to her.

"I should like some champagne," she told him, and they steered for the supper-table.

"Something's happened," he said.

"Yes. I'm an abandoned woman." She felt quite light-headed.

"What do you mean?"

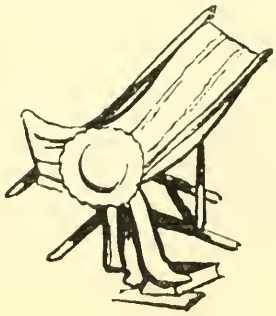
"Just that. Larry has thrown me over—turned me adrift."

"You aren't in earnest!"

"It's true—unless I'm dreaming."

She heard him inhale deeply.

"What luck! What amazing, incredible luck!" he said, and they reached the crowded supper-table.



CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

A BIG LAUNCH WAS COMING OUT TO THE "DIDO," which was stopping only a few hours at Marseilles and was not going to wharf. It was a quiet, grey, rather chilly morning. The water was like steel.

There was much luggage on deck, and passengers dressed for the shore were gathering near the gangway. The purser and Straker were there.

"Are you sorry or glad at the end of a voyage?" Straker asked him.

The purser considered.

"I'm both," he answered. "I'm glad to get ashore again for a short spell, though I haven't any real home; and at the same time I have a sort of melancholy as soon as we come to the last days. I've made friends, you see, and I've made them only to lose them. One knows that. Ship-board acquaintances are never kept up. In the middle of a voyage I wish to goodness it was ended, and at the end I always have the feeling of a break-up."

"I can quite understand it," said Straker. "One can't live six weeks with any group of people without becoming attached to them. One becomes so without knowing it. You don't require to like a person to become attached to him; proximity and time are all

that are needed. Husbands and wives who have plagued each other for years often suffer severely when one of them dies. There's a good deal of the vegetable about us. We not only send down roots into our place of habitation, but we put out tendrils to our neighbours. And you, at the end of a voyage, have to sever those tendrils. I can quite understand your feeling of a break-up. I share it with you this morning—and a fortnight ago I was wishing half these people at the bottom of the sea."

"It's like this," pursued the purser, "one hates to part with them—but, thank God one doesn't have to live with them all one's life!"

"Excellent!" laughed Straker. "You've put a whole philosophy in those words. Life is made up of contradictions. We don't want to die, but we want the time to pass. We detest work, but we can't be happy without it. We must have friends, though they afflict us."

The launch was alongside, and passengers were passing down the gangway. Straker shook hands with the purser and picked up his suitcase. Miss Lablanche had already descended. Anthone followed him.

Soon the launch was cutting a swath on the steely water, and invisible threads were snapping.

Vera and Anthone had made their arrangements. He had given her an address in the Adelphi, to which she was to go from Waterloo. This she was to do in deference to Fleetwood's wishes. Waterloo, as he said, was the final point of dispersal for those passengers who disembarked at Southampton; and

at Waterloo he would see her into a taxi and she could then join Anthone. This would merely be decent manners, and would prevent talk.

This appeared to be Fleetwood's sole concern now. At any rate he spared no pains to preserve appearances. So thoroughly did he play his part of the attached husband that the situation seemed at times unreal to Vera. Not only in public but in private he was courteous and attentive to her. He had resumed his bridge-playing, and he did not now discontinue it, though he played rather less than formerly, and thus Vera had more of his company than she had had before. His game had gone off, but she did not know this. There was nothing in his manner to suggest that his mind was not at ease.

As for herself, the absence of Anthone and Fleetwood's admirable acting combined to create the illusion that she had been dreaming and that nothing had occurred to change her relations with Larry. Sometimes this illusion was very strong, though even then its suggestions troubled her. They took her back to the old days before Anthone, the old, quiet days when she and Larry had been happy together. Life would be strange—it might even be desolate—without Larry, the mild lover who had grown into a trusty friend. Could Anthone replace him? Did she love Anthone? Was passion to be trusted? . . . Vera experienced heart-sinkings. For security she was exchanging—what? She could not tell. No one could tell. Not even Anthone.

The material side of the matter did not bother her. Anthone had a small private income—not to be compared with Larry's—but enough. If Anthone had

had nothing she would not have cared, if only she had been sure that she was taking the right step.

It was a step, however, that she had to take. In fact she had taken it. Really, there had been no option. What other answer could she have made to that accusation? Had it been true, ah, then she might have denied it. But she could not have denied what was so cruelly false, so peculiarly wounding and insulting.

Nevertheless, reviewing the matter calmly, it was possible to excuse Larry, tormented, as no doubt he was, by jealousy, which he had never shown till then. But, having excused him, what? What followed? Nothing. She could not go to him and say: "Larry, I misled you. Nothing—to cause a divorce—took place between me and Anthone. Will you take me back?"

In the first place it was unlikely that he would believe her. In the second place pride forbade it. And in the third place, did she really wish to remain Mrs. Fleetwood? She could not make up her mind. Now that this seemed no longer possible, she was regretting it: but if it were made possible again, she knew that she would be loath to give up Anthone. She wanted them both. It was the old story. Now that she was to lose Larry, it was him she wished to keep. *Having* Anthone, she had not the wish to keep him.

Thus she argued with herself in her most lucid moments, seeing the case as it really was. At other times she was simply oppressed by sadness to think that an end had come of her life with Larry. And at other times again she was filled with pity for him.

She believed that he still loved her and that pride alone was stiffening his countenance. Up till that night he must have loved her, or jealousy could never have provoked him to make that wild accusation. It was painful to think of Larry suffering, and to think of Larry lonely as he would be when she had gone to Anthone.

Twice she was on the point of telling him exactly what had happened on the night of the dance. On the second occasion she even began the story. They were in their cabin. He was undressing ; she in bed.

" Larry," she said, " I want to tell you something."

" Yes ? What is it ? " he asked courteously but without looking at her.

" It's about that night—that night, you know, when we—had the row——"

" I'd rather," he interrupted her with gentle decision, " hear nothing more about that night. I know all I wish to know."

She very nearly said : " You don't know anything." But the moment passed, and she said no more.

The minute he had spoken he was sorry. She had had something to say, something which might possibly have led to a reconciliation. What devil of perversity had prompted him to cut her short ! Having done so, in that manner, he could not retract. He tried. The words were there, but his tongue was fast. The minutes went by, dragging with them the pleading opportunity, which vanished in the distance. She had turned her face to the bulkhead ; she was pretending sleep. She would not answer now if he were to speak to her. He was sure of that. He remembered.

But she would have answered him.

He set about justifying himself. What, of advantage, could she have had to say? Had she not admitted her guilt? Did she not love Anthone? That made an end. A thing was black or white in Fleetwood's eyes. He had no perception for nuances.

Had it been simply a question of the one lapse (supposing that there had been but the one lapse, which was not very probable) he believed that he could have forgiven her. It was what that lapse, taken with all the other evidence, signified, which made the decision inevitable. As clearly as print it signified that she was in love with Anthone and had, as a consequence, ceased to love her husband. The fact was as plain as that two and two made four. You could no more talk it away than you could talk away an axiom.

This should have disposed of the matter, but it did not. He had now no consistency of mood or mind from hour to hour. He loved her, he was indifferent to her, he hated her. At one moment he was determined that he must put pride in his pocket and beg her to stay with him; at the next, austerely resolved to let her go. These vacillations weakened him. He found it more and more difficult to play his part, and the strain of it affected him physically. But he did not relax in it; he summoned his reserves of strength to this task.

Deprived of these reserves, his mind no longer fought to retain Vera. He recognised her loss as a calamity, but he saw it as unavoidable, and one that must have occurred to him sooner or later. This view of the matter became fixed. There were no more vacillations. He was old, Fleetwood told himself;

too old for her ; and for that alone he must lose her. It began to seem to him that what was happening was nothing more nor less than a process of nature. She had kept her youth while he had aged ; then youth had called to youth and had been answered. That was the case in a nutshell. He tried not to pity himself, but he did a little. Life was piteous, and he was a part of life, inseparable from it, gladly though he would have detached himself. The detached attitude was imaginary : nobody ever attained it. Philosophy wasn't worth a damn when you came to your own case.

Memories tortured him. They rose up in dozens out of the past ten years. The evening when he had asked her to marry him : he remembered what she had said, how she had looked, the sweet, faint perfume of her. The night when the child had been born : what agonies he had endured ! and how, at the good word, his heart had bounded ! It was her life he had wanted, not the child's. And it was still her life he wanted. The boy, whom he had mourned until quite recently, had shrunk to the proportion of an episode in a long story. Between that loss and this there was no comparison. But it was decreed ; nothing could avert it.

This seemed very strange as he looked surreptitiously at her, for in appearance she was the same woman or hardly a whit altered. Then what had altered ? Had he altered ? Or had she never been his ? He saw that he was arguing from false premises. There was no need for either of them to have altered essentially. They had altered relatively, and with that she had passed from him. Nature every second was making

such changes, in her never-ceasing frenzy for new patterns.

As Fleetwood's mind thus yielded to the blow that had fallen, he began, in verity, to feel old.

By this time the *Dido* had rounded Spain and crossed the Bay of Biscay.

She entered the English Channel.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

SPITHEAD WAS IN SIGHT.

The wooded shores of Hampshire and the hills of the Isle of Wight looked very green, to eyes that had come from the parched lands of the South. The brilliant sun and the numberless yachts on the blue Solent gave a pleasant impression of England as a land of summer idleness. England, in fact, was wearing her most attractive mask.

This morning the passengers were standing, except a few who sat upon their luggage or had secured seats on the benches. All chairs were either packed or stowed away. The luggage almost covered the lower decks, and the after hatchway was open.

Most faces wore a slightly tense expression. The time had come to grapple with the world again : the old contacts, lost for so many weeks, were to be resumed. Some were facing the disagreeable fact of work ; others the no more agreeable fact that none was visible, that it had to be sought, and that it might be coy. Martin Sale was among the latter : he looked serious : yesterday the weighing-machine, after fostering hope for a fortnight, had been unkind. The old fear was on his back again. Ettrick stood sombrely

apart, impatient to quit the scene of his mortification. Major Pageant had come aft, to say good-bye to O'Malley. The major felt warmly towards O'Malley ; this was a man he would never forget.

Mrs. Chisman was sitting on a cabin trunk. She had missed Ern particularly in the last twenty-four hours, for he always looked after the luggage and did most of the packing. She did not feel at all the same without Ern : she said so often to the Pig's mother. And life was not going to be the same again : it had almost certainly changed for the worse. The future was dark ; and two spectres, the spectre of work and the spectre of poverty, flickered in that darkness. The Solent sadly reminded her of the day when she had sailed from it ; young, a wife, setting out for a new land. Had she only been content to stay in that new land, as Ern had wished to do ! Ann's conscience was now quite unburdened, but she was full of repinings. Her feeling about Ern was that she had lost him : it seldom struck her that he had lost anything.

The Pig's mother was having a last talk with her ; and the Pig's mother's mind was not free from care. It should have been, for she was on a holiday, but care was probably born in the Garden of Eden, before Eve ate the apple. She was sure that her trunk in the hold had been smashed to bits : it was an old trunk : it was madness to have brought it with them. She had visions, which she communicated to Ann, of the disembowelled trunk and her clothes forlornly scattered.

" I wish I'd nothing more to worry about," Ann answered her rather acidly ; and the Pig's mother's

heart was pricked and her mind was eased. Miraculously the trunk became whole again.

The Pig's father, with Ida and Ben, came over from the hatchway, into which he had for some moments been peering.

"Your trunk's all right," he said. "I've just got a glimpse of it."

"I knew it this very minute," cried the Pig's mother. "If that isn't enough to make one believe in telepathy!"

Algy at least had no cares. He made a point of never entertaining them and passed them on to others. He was confident that the fatted calf would be killed for him, and optimistic about that small flotation. His face shone as brightly as the sun upon Southampton Water, but the air he sniffed was the air of Piccadilly.

The Pigeon, in a pearl-grey suit, was strutting to and fro and crooning happily. The face of the Lady without any luggage was inscrutable. She remained an impenetrable problem, a fascinating mystery. Soon she would step ashore and the eye would lose her, the imagination boggle in its attempt to follow her. Even the all-knowing Tulip could not read her rune.

The boatswain and his girl were parting.

"I wonder," she was saying, "what kind of a girl you'll be kissing on your next trip. I expect she'll be small and fair, the opposite of me."

"Whatever she's like," answered the boatswain, "I'll swear she won't be as nice a girl as you. I'll think of you when I'm thousands of miles away, I will."

He said that to them all, and she knew that he said it ; nevertheless she liked to hear it.

" That's an old tale," she rejoined. " Tell us something new."

" Take my oath," declared the boatswain, " if I wasn't a married man, I'd marry you to-morrow."

" Catch me marrying a sailor ! "

Southampton's wharves were drawing near. On the promenade deck the Byways were bidding adieu to Miss Windle and Mr. Amersham, about whose forthcoming nuptials there was no secret. They were travelling to Town together. Miss Windle would be met there by her friends, and Mr. Amersham was going to a respectable private hotel which the canon's wife had recommended to him. The tip he had bestowed on Breese had not raised him in the steward's estimation ; but Mr. Amersham had already begun to economise. He moved on with Miss Windle to where their baggage was stacked. The Fleetwoods passed with a brief salute to the Byways.

" That man looks ill," said the canon. " Worn, don't you think ? "

His wife agreed.

" He should have married an older woman," added the canon, who sometimes thought aloud.

" A different sort of woman," Mrs. Byway amended.

" Ah, my dear," said her husband playfully, " but all women can't come up to *your* standard." The canon's eyes gleamed softly on her.

There was more than sufficient room in the train, and Fleetwood found an empty first-class carriage.

He and Vera had it to themselves when the train started. It was then some minutes past twelve, and the train was due in London at 1.50. They were lunching in the dining-car.

He had taken a corner seat with his face to the engine. Vera had her back to the engine and was sitting in the corner furthest from him. Both had newspapers and were reading.

There had been a big railway accident in the North, and Fleetwood read about it. Seven killed and twenty-four injured. There were the usual survivors' stories, and the usual mystery surrounding the cause of the disaster.

It appeared to have been a very horrible affair, but Fleetwood was unharrowed. His feelings had too much on hand to respond to the sufferings of others. It occurred to him that he would not care if the train in which he was travelling met with an accident and he were one of the victims : killed outright, of course. A crash, the world in bits, and then no more. Done with it all. . . . On second thoughts, he did not *desire* to die. He was merely indifferent about it.

He recalled a remark of Straker's that he had happened to catch. " When you have perceived that it is of equal importance whether you lose a sixpence or your life, then you have approached the divine wisdom."

If that was so, thought Fleetwood, he must be near it. Sixpence or his life—they seemed of about equal worth. One would not throw either of them away, but one would not lament the loss of either.

But there wasn't going to be a railway accident.

He was rushing to another kind of disaster. In an hour, or a little more, he would have seen the last of Vera. . . . The last of Vera. . . . The last of Vera.

His eyes, which had been reading while his mind wandered, lost their focus and became fixed in a blurred stare. He knew that until this moment he had not truly believed that this was to be. It had been like one's recognition of the fact of death : a thing admitted but not realised. Now it had struck home.

He was seized with a mental vertigo. When his mind ceased to whirl, it grew feverishly active. Was there nothing to be done, at this eleventh hour ? No way of averting the catastrophe ?

An appeal. A revelation of himself. Had he ever shown her his whole heart ? He never had. She did not, could not, know how he had loved her. He would throw himself on her mercy. Instead of forgiving her, he would ask her to forgive him, for his neglect and insane perversity, which really were the cause of what had happened. He would show her all the love that was in his heart. She would know him for the first time.

A waiter appeared and announced that luncheon was ready.

" We'd better go, I suppose," said Fleetwood. " Are you hungry ? "

" Not very," answered Vera.

" Neither am I. However—we'd better eat something."

Involuntarily he had dropped back into his old tone and manner. He perceived that. Still, it did not matter. After lunch he would speak, and he

might feel the better for a glass of wine. But once they were back in the compartment he must not delay a minute, and he would try to get lunch over as quickly as possible.

The train was travelling at a great pace and its motion was very unsteady. Fleetwood found it difficult to walk in the corridor. He staggered like a drunken man.

He was in front and he looked round to see how Vera was faring. She did not appear to be in difficulties, and this made him somewhat annoyed with himself. Was he going in the legs ? He checked a mischievous thought.

The next car was the dining-car, and he was glad to be seated. They were promptly attended, and he told the waiter to be as quick as he could. The wine-waiter came, and he ordered a white Bordeaux. He wished afterwards that he had ordered Burgundy : it had more body in it.

He ate with determination but no appetite and said little to Vera. She seemed to have nothing to say. In twenty minutes they had finished and he quickly obtained the bill. He paid it and rose from the table.

At that moment the train gave a particularly violent lurch. Fleetwood lost his balance and, in trying to recover it, swept a tumbler and the empty bottle to the floor. Only Vera's steadying hand saved him from pulling the cloth from the table. The fall of the glass and bottle had clapped the attention of the whole carriage upon them, and Fleetwood was irritably aware of being raked by eyes. Vera was still holding his arm, supporting him, and suddenly he saw the

picture that they presented. At least he saw a picture. And he heard unuttered comments.

Old ! Of course he was old. Nearly decrepit. An old fool with a young wife. . . . Here, in a living tableau, was the truth made evident.

" Please let go my arm," he said.

She dropped it, and preceded him out of the car.

When they were seated again she turned her face from him and looked out of the window. He did not speak.

Soon the train entered the squalid and dreadful wilderness which divides the outer southern suburbs from London. The lost and labyrinthine streets fled by, and Westminster's clock-tower rose to heaven.

Vera turned to him as if she would say something, but at the same instant Fleetwood cleared his throat. There were traces of tears in her eyes, but he did not notice them. He was looking obliquely at her.

" I hope," he said, " you will be happy in your new life. I believe that what has happened is the best thing for both of us."

Vera could control herself no longer. Her face crumpled and she burst into tears.

" My God ! Vera," croaked Fleetwood. " Is this a nightmare ? "

" Yes, yes, yes ! " she cried. " A nightmare, Larry ! But it's over now. We're out of it."

" Thank God ! " he said. " And here we are. Pull yourself together, Vera ! "

The train slowed, the light dimmed, there was an array of porters.

" Stick close to me," said Fleetwood, " while I get the luggage, or the damned thing will come back again."

" I'll hold your hand," said Vera, hastily drying her tears.

A porter opened the door.

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IT has been the consistent aim of this firm to establish a personal link between author, publisher and reader, valuable and helpful to all three.

A book is the most personal of creations. In its embryo state it is peculiarly the possession of its author. Through his mind it is brought to life and acquires an individuality which appeals, or otherwise, to the publisher to whom it is submitted.

Upon its acceptance it assumes for the publisher a definite personality. He feels that it "fits" into his list; he feels that it possesses qualities promising success and he is prepared to do everything possible towards the fulfilment of that success.

The day of its publication establishes contact with the third person in this vital chain—the reader. Upon him rests the ultimate responsibility of success or failure for the book.

It is encouraging both to the publisher and to the author to hear the opinions of their readers. Presumably our books hold some interest for you. You have read them and enjoyed them in varying degree. The authors of the books announced in this list, and we, as publishers, are anxious to establish personal contact with our readers and the only way for this to be done is for the reader to write and give us his views whenever he feels inclined.

PATERNOSTER HOUSE
PATERNOSTER ROW - LONDON - E.C.4
Telephone: City 3200 *Telegrams:* Literarius, London

Six Against the Yard

In which

Dorothy L. Sayers, Margery Allingham, Father Ronald Knox, Anthony Berkeley, Russell Thorndyke & Freeman Wills Crofts

commit the Crime of Murder
and are pursued by

Ex-Superintendent Cornish of the C.I.D.

LYING idly in his bath the instigator of this unique volume contemplated murder. There existed one whom he wished dead, and it occurred to him that most people, however Christian, knew of one for whom they desired a similar fate.

Thus it was that this book, with its brilliant band of contributors, grew into being. We wrote to each of them and suggested, quite casually, that they might like to commit, upon paper, a murder which they felt to be as perfect in its execution as they could conceive. With enthusiasm they entered into the idea and each of them has produced in the form of a short novel, an exact description of the circumstances and perpetration of their crime. From its instigation to its final act they have, in their own way, perfected their plans, lured their victims, dispatched them from life and covered their tracks.

But have their plans been as fool-proof as they believe ? Have they made, as so many criminals do make, that tiny slip which will lead to their detection ? Is Dorothy Sayers quite certain that she will not hang from the neck until she is dead ? Is Father Knox convinced that the jury will acquit him, if he finds himself in the dock ? Is

Anthony Berkeley prepared to withstand the searching questions of the police ?

And it is here that Ex-Superintendent Cornish of the C.I.D. comes along with his vast experience of crime in real life. At the conclusion of each short novel Mr. Cornish deals with the case from the police point of view. He visits the scene of the crime and, with the facts in his possession which he has culled from the story, sets to work to find that flaw in the execution which will enable him to bring about the arrest of Margery Allingham or Russell Thorndyke. Is he successful ? Has he found those tell-tale clues, and if he hasn't, can you ?

Six Against the Yard is the first volume of its kind ever produced. Brilliant and exciting, its popularity will be immense.

7/6

DOROTHY SAYERS

↔

ANTHONY BERKELEY

↔

RONALD KNOX

↔

MARGERY ALLINGHAM

↔

FREEMAN WILLS CROFTS

↔

RUSSELL THORNDYKE

defy

EX-SUPERINTENDENT CORNISH

Thorston Hall

by O. S. Macdonell

Author of "George Ashbury" (7th impression)

VERY rarely does a first novel enjoy the success and wide acclamation which was accorded *George Ashbury* upon its publication. If Mr. Macdonell can continue as well as he has begun, was the implication of the reviews, he will prove to be the most vigorous and refreshing novelist recent years have produced.

George Ashbury was written far away in Burma. Across the distance Mr. Macdonell saw the land of his boyhood, remembered the tales he had been told of the Fells and the hills of Lakeland, and wrote *George Ashbury*. Since then he has returned to England and from his home in the Lake District that he knows and loves so well, he sends us the manuscript of *Thorston Hall*.

It is, we are convinced, a magnificent and stirring novel which achieves much more than the fulfilment of the promise of *George Ashbury*. Once again the scene is the Lake District and the story, which is set in the middle of last century, describes the heroic fight against increasingly antagonistic circumstances, made by John Thorston for the success of his farm.

A cousin of the Riggs of Buttermere and about the same age as Reuben, Thorston was a yeoman farmer whose ancestors had owned the freehold of Thorston for many generations. Hard-working, strong, upright, proud, but far too narrow-minded to adapt himself to changing conditions, Thorston battles heroically against local antagonism and adversity.

7/6

The Moon in Scorpio

by William J. Woltman

IT is not unnatural that we should take more delight in the publishing of some books than of others. Perhaps it is that they contain some elusive quality, a beauty which we cannot describe; perhaps their very freshness breathes a wonder which we cannot forget. But whatever may be the reason it applies with a very real force to Mr. Woltman's first English novel.

"I have not read for a very long time such a lovely book. The study of Farrell (the chief character) is superb. I don't know why—(and therein lies the whole strength of the thing)—he just is superb. So clear and beautiful is the quality of mind behind this book that I urge you strongly to take it. And the wit—can you beat this piece of irony? 'To Hendrik Reurs, Hoytema's story sounded like Beethoven's Fifth Symphony played by Sir Thomas Beecham. . . .' A lovely book. Moreover a book that will sell. It is fresh and strange and unusual and it puts into words what most people are dumb about."

The above is no enthusiastic critic announcing his weekly masterpiece, but is quoted from the opinion of the critical reader to whom we submit our manuscripts.

William Woltman is partly Dutch and lives in Holland. He has travelled very extensively, has published previous novels in Holland and has translated into Dutch Upton Sinclair's *The Millennium.*

7/6

Mrs. Murphy Buries the Hatchet

by Agnes Romilly White

Author of "Gape Row"

WHEN Mrs. Murphy made her appearance in Miss White's first novel *Gape Row* the applause was terrific. "She is a gorgeous woman," wrote St. John Ervine; "She is stout and adorable," said *Punch*; whilst Gerald Gould writing in the *Observer* considered "That if Miss White had done nothing but create Mrs. Murphy, she would already have proved herself as a masterly creator of character and fashioner of speech. For my own part, I adore Mrs. Murphy mainly and all the while."

It will be appreciated that Mrs. Murphy has an audience to face, for she made of *Gape Row* one of the best-selling first novels of the year. Here, happily, she is again. She has been a little time in coming, but she is a sturdy character and would only appear when convinced she was at her best.

Although the action of this new novel takes place considerably later than *Gape Row*, Mrs. Murphy's natural force is not abated. Time cannot wither nor custom stale this inimitable Irish woman.

In this book the shadow of the War years has passed away from Gape Row and its inhabitants; but a domestic drama, and a tense situation of inter-family feuds, provide abundant interest and Mrs. Murphy, with her voluminous person, ready tongue, abundant humour and constant delight in interfering in the affairs of other people, continues to dominate the situation as of old.

7/6

Noah's Ark

by S. W. Powell

Author of "Autobiography of a Rascal"

DURING the spring of 1935 we published, anonymously, *Autobiography of a Rascal.* We neither vouched for the truth of its facts, nor the authenticity of its origin. But we gave it the format of a serious work, and ushered it forth. From the first it was a success; distinguished critics swallowed the bait whole and praised it to the skies; other no less distinguished critics accepted it a little dubiously, but nevertheless were equally eulogistic. It sold well and, apparently, everyone was happy.

The reviews, in the light of the book's authorship, were a tribute to the skill of Mr. Powell's style and originality and readers of *Noah's Ark* will notice the same quiet "devilment" and humour of outlook.

The scene of *Noah's Ark* is a modern liner. Far too many novels have had a similar setting, but we do not know of one which approaches the same realism of atmosphere, or which penetrates so deeply into the odd relationships which sea-voyages establish between members of the human race.

The story in this book is unimportant. One of our readers made this a point of criticism in her report. But the indistinct impression which remains at the end is not very different from the impression left at the end of all sea-voyages.

In the book there is drama. The drama of men and women in love; of men and women who have grown tired; of men and women stripped of pretence. There is humour too, pathos, tragedy and little sad incidents which touch the heart.

We have tried to dissociate this from the ordinary novel, and to this end Miss Bip Pares has decorated the book with charming and appropriate illustrations.

7/6

This Is Our Day

by Ellen Wilkinson

Author of "Clash", "The Division Bell Mystery"

NO one has had better opportunities of seeing behind the scenes of which she writes in this novel than Miss Wilkinson. One of the most passionate, sincere and feared women politicians in the country, Ellen Wilkinson can write as few politicians can write. With immense courage, with exuberant vitality, and with an imagination both penetrating and sympathetic, she writes in this novel of the chaotic modern world, and the human problems of men and women faced with the necessity of "keeping on."

The scenes of *This Is Our Day* are the Berlin with the Nazis in power; the Paris of the refugees; the London of Sir Oswald Mosley, the National Government, and the Jubilee and the North with its unemployment.

Vincent Norris, a young man born during the War, is excited by the world in which he lives, but is determined that he and his like will never fight another war. As a journalist he is sent to Berlin where he arrives immediately after the Reichstag fire; from there he goes to Paris and in this atmosphere he is thrown at once into a fierce conflict where love compels him to see first one side and then the other.

Norris finds talk of war in every capital as the one solution. In his idealism he cries out against it, but is powerless to resist the seemingly overwhelming odds. The battle which Norris has to fight is the battle of a generation against crassness and stupidity. Ellen Wilkinson, in this memorable and powerful story, has dramatized the problem before the world and has resolved it into its only important element—the human factor.

7/6

Somewhere in Sark

by Austin Philips

Author of "The Unknown Goddess," "That Girl Out in Corsica," "Man on the Night Mail Train" (5th thous.) etc.

IF you have ever visited Sark this novel will appeal as much for the brilliance of its descriptions as for the excitement of its story; and if you have *not* been to Sark it is more than likely that you will have booked your passage by the time the last page of Austin Philips' thriller has been turned.

It was a strange coincidence which arranged that Mr. Philips should finish this novel a few days before the opening of a recent *cause célèbre* which had for its setting the Royal Court at Guernsey. For in the course of this story a most vivid picture is given of a full-dress trial before the bailiff and Jurats of Guernsey (under whose legal jurisdiction Sark comes).

7/6

£250
Country Novel Competition

It is with regret that we have to announce the closing of this competition. First advertised in the Autumn of 1933 and the closing date for entries extended six months beyond the original time, it was hoped that a manuscript worthy of the prize and of the theme might ultimately put in its appearance.

Many manuscripts were submitted but, unfortunately, not one attained the high standard rightly set by the adjudicators. To continue the competition indefinitely is neither practicable nor desirable, and thus the only possible course is to bring it to an end.

The Suffering Winter

by

Peter Stucley

Author of "Two Months' Grace"

PETER STUCLEY, the author of that entertaining travel book, *Two Months' Grace*, has chosen for his first novel a theme of particular significance to-day.

His hero is a young man with a public-school and country-house background who, finding many of the ideas and ideals of his class to be incompatible with growing social and political implications leaves his particular world and goes to live among the unemployed miners in a valley of South Wales.

The story moves between a highly sophisticated section of London society and the people of the distressed area, while the theme develops into a conflict between the abandonment of the world to which John Fanshawe belongs by birth, and his adoption of the working-class cause. His relations with two girls of different social levels also play an important part in the main theme.

Communist meetings, erotic night-clubs, unemployed demonstrations and a curious week-end party are all details from this picture of two contrasting spheres.

Two Months' Grace was praised for its charm and wit; there is nothing idyllic about the story which Mr. Stucley now tells.

When we remember, however, that the author of both books is still in the early twenties, this very change of mood gives his work a particular interest and importance.

7/6

Quest Romantic

by Captain F. H. Mellor

Author of "Sword and Spear"

CAPTAIN MELLOR'S first book *Sword and Spear* was a delightful book to publish, and, as you may judge from the selection of opinions printed at the back of this list, a delightful book to review. It achieved a considerable success and encouraged our belief that Captain Mellor is a writer with a most exciting future before him.

Quest Romantic is a better book than *Sword and Spear*—which is as it should be! After the Emirates of Nigeria, Mellor found England a trifle dull, and his eager spirit sought new fields for adventure. Seville and Granada had stimulated his interest in the Moorish races, and so he took the first opportunity of proceeding to Morocco. Here he lost his heart to a land where sometimes it seems as if time has stood still since the days of Mulai Idriss.

Travelling with little money and in humble but ever interesting ways, Captain Mellor obtained a deep insight into this magic land. He reached Tiznit, the desert city, where every day the drums proclaim the glory of the Sultan; where soldiers with loaded rifles guard the gates against the desert rovers who every now and then ride forth to pillage and to slay. He saw the desert tribes gallop past, firing their guns in the Fantasia; crossed the snow-clad High Atlas and reached Wazazat of the Castles, where he was received by Hamadi El Glaoui the Lord of the Mountains.

Quest Romantic, with its superb photographs, is a gallant and splendid book in which a man sets forth in search of adventure and finds it; but who in his search retains a sense of humour and allows no circumstance to depress him.

Illustrated, 15/-

Wining and Dining

by G. Bernard Hughes

THE ordinary man is not a gourmet; he is not, even in the accepted sense, a connoisseur of either food or wine. But there are occasions, we all know them, when the experience of such a man is an impressive boon!

This book, valuable and entertaining as it is, has been written for the man and woman who begins to feel anxious as the wine waiter approaches with his fearsome list. It is for the man and woman who enjoys food and wine, but makes a life study of neither. There are, we know, more extensive treatises on the subject, but nothing so helpful to the amateur. The first section deals comprehensively with the subject of wining and dining; from serving the wine at home, the type of glass to use with each wine, the wine to select with each dish and so on to the intricate process of ordering a complete dinner at the most exclusive hotel.

The second section is full of farmhouse cellar treasures. Recipes are given, complete with the most guarded secrets for the making of almost every conceivable home-made wine and liqueur. Another section describes the mixing of cocktails and punch, and dozens of recipes are supplied—many of them new.

CONTENTS

Part I

WINING AND DINING

Part II

Part III

3/6

Cricket in Firelight

A Cricketer's book for all the year round

by Richard Binns

IT is with good purpose that this book appears at a time when the evenings are drawing in, the tints of autumn are appearing, and many cricket pitches are being left to the tender care of grazing sheep.

Cricket in Firelight is a very delightful, friendly book. We are not experts upon the ancient game, we cannot recall great cricketing feats of the past without resource to Wisden's. But this particular book appealed to us in a peculiar way. It gripped us, in the first place, by the brilliance of its style and later we were enthralled by the animation of its descriptions, and the sheer joy of its good fellowship.

Mr. Binns is a journalist. He has experienced many sides of newspaper activities and all his life he has made a hobby of cricket. During the past season he reported many matches for the *Sunday Observer*, and he wrote this book whilst recovering from a long and serious illness.

In these pages we are taken through the unforgettable cricket of boyhood and youth, from the street pavement and the backyards to the village club, the town club and thence to the county grounds and, with his gifted friend "Jerry," Mr. Binns reconstructs by the fireside some of the great matches of bygone days.

This, in truth, is a book for the fireside. The wind may howl; the rain may come; the wireless may announce the football results but, with this book beside him, the enthusiast may forget them all amidst fascinating and brilliant pages.

8/6

Sound an Alarm!

True Stories of Rescue from Danger

Edited by CAPTAIN F. H. MELLOR and IVAN BILIBIN

THROUGH the centuries, stories of rescue from danger have stirred the imagination of men, have inspired some of the world's great legends and have called forth unsuspected heroism.

In the world to-day are men who have been rescued from appalling dangers and it is a curious reflection upon the march of events in Europe and Asia that such stories as are written in this volume by comparatively unknown men can be authenticated in every line.

The scene of this volume shifts through many lands; Flanders, Morocco, India, England, Russia, written by people with whom it has been touch and go and who have emerged from terrible danger. In one of them the actor, his story told here by Prince Leonid Lieven, paid the supreme penalty; in another Captain Mellor tells of how he liked the land of Flanders and in yet another John Brown describes the dangers which have faced him in our own country.

A further number of these enthralling stories are connected with Russia, and their hero is the private individual struggling with the aid of his fellow men against the elemental tides of revolution. They are tales of luck and human resourcefulness, every one of them true and every one of them stranger, more fascinating than their fictional counterpart could ever be.

We ourselves have been thrilled by this extraordinarily human book and the reader will find himself carried away by the fears and hopes and joys of this little band of adventurers who, in spite of themselves, were forced to live dangerously.

10/6

Great Farmers

by

Professor James Scott-Watson

and

May Elliot Hobbs

HERE is a volume of the greatest value and interest. We are a nation of agriculturists and there is no industry so filled with romance, nor one which has had so profound an influence upon the national character as that of agriculture.

In this book Professor Scott-Watson and Mrs. Hobbs tell, in popular and brilliant style, the story of agriculture during the past century, tracing its attainment to the peaks of prosperity, its decline to long years of depression and its present rejuvenation.

A procession of great men pass through these pages; men whose lives were devoted to the welfare of their farms and who made names for themselves through the brilliance of their farming. Such men as Robert Hobbs, George Taylor, Henry Dudding, Amos Cruickshank and William Duthrie; Sanders, Spencer, Sir William Somerville, James Caid and many others.

We can truly say of this book that it is a cavalcade of agriculture which few can afford to miss. Those who remember Professor Scott-Watson's brilliant series of broadcast talks will know the sympathy of his viewpoint and the human interpretation he can put upon his subject. Mrs. Elliot Hobbs, a gifted and brilliant personality, is well equipped by virtue of her many connections to collaborate in the production of this important standard work.

Illustrated, 18/-

The Threshold

An Anthology from those at School

IT is with considerable pleasure that we announce the active preparation of an Anthology which we believe to be not only unique, but of considerable interest and no little importance.

It occurred to us that, in the schools of England, there must, each year, be written quantities of poems, essays, short stories and sketches worthy of a greater permanence than that achieved by an "Exercise" book.

As Editor of this new anthology we have appointed Mr. R. W. Moore, Sixth Form Master at Shrewsbury School, who has had wide literary experience, and has published, among other things, *Prose at Present.*

The first volume of this Anthology, which might conceivably evolve into a hardy annual, is now in active preparation. It will contain a great variety of literary creations and will be representative of the best work achieved in the Public and Secondary schools of this country.

Probably 8/6

I Will Not Rest

by

Romain Rolland

Author of "Above the Battle", "John Christopher", "The Soul Enchanted", etc.

ROMAIN ROLLAND, one of the most outstanding literary figures of the age, is also one of the most influential leaders of opinion on the Continent. He published, early in the War, a book which has already become a classic of its kind, containing an appeal to all thinking people to hold themselves aloof from the hateful passions which were then sweeping the world. *I Will Not Rest* will rank in importance with that famous work, *Above the Battle*. In the essays which comprise this volume, M. Rolland, with the warmth and vehemence that always exalt his style, deals with the varied issues of War, Peace, Fascism, Communism and Imperialism, which agitate our generation. He writes not as a theorist, or a politician or an economist, but as an earnest citizen caring intensely for the welfare of the common man and deeply sensible of the danger which threatens him through the obstinacy and arrogance of vested interests. His views on Russia; his fears for peace; his hatred of every form of persecution and oppression, wherever practised; his glowing and inextinguishable faith in the future of mankind, are all expressed with a vigorous and challenging energy of phrase.

This, in short, is a book no one can afford to miss who wishes to be acquainted with what one of the master-minds of Europe has to say on the vital problems which are, to-day, everybody's problems.

8/6

Televiewing

by

Captain Ernest H. Robinson

Author of "Everyman's Wireless," "Perfect Broadcasting Reception," Technical Special Correspondent to the "Observer"; Radio Research Station G–5YM

With a Foreword by

GERALD COCK, M.V.O., Director of Television, the B.B.C.

FOR the publication of one of the first non-technical and popular books on television, we are fortunate in securing so distinguished and experienced an expert as Captain Robinson. He has been experimenting with and thinking and writing about wireless for more than fifteen years and is well known for his books and for his contributions to the *Observer*.

This book is designed for that great body of intelligent people who have a curiosity about the new art of television, but whose reading has not taken them very far into those realms of endeavour where engineers work miracles all day long, changing sound and light into electricity and back again.

Captain Robinson gives a brief and necessary history of television to indicate something of the problems that have had to be solved and how the solving has been done. The book begins with a very simple explanation of fundamentals; the different systems at present in use are explained in non-technical language, and these explanations embrace both transmission and reception. The huge financial problems involved are discussed as are complex problems of programmes.

So far as possible this important and most fascinating book tells in simple language the complete story of television as it is to-day and as it may be to-morrow.

Illustrated, 6/-

The Soviet State

A Study of Bolshevik Rule

by Bertram W. Maxwell

Professor of History and Political Science, Washburn College, Author of "Contemporary Municipal Government of Germany".

WE print below a résumé "contents" of this book as this establishes, more than anything we could write, its scope and its obvious importance to students and to interested members of the general public.

RÉSUMÉ OF CONTENTS

Part I

THE ORGANS OF GOVERNMENT OF THE SOVIET STATE

Russia Before the Revolution of 1917; The Russian Parliament; Civil Service; The Judicial System; The Procuracy; Administration; The Creation of the Soviet State; Citizenship; The Communist Party; Municipal Government; Municipal Finance; Rural Government; Provincial Government; Organization of the Central Government; Civil Service and Judiciary.

Part II

THE CITIZEN AND THE STATE

Administrative Coercion; State Liability and Law Enforcement; Civil Liberty; The Church and the State; The Supervision of the Press and Popular Amusements; The Police; The Supervision of Economic and Social Life; Labour Legislation; Women and Children; Social Evils; The Administration of Educational, Cultural, and Health Institutions.

Notes and References. Bibliography. Index.

18/- *net*

Topical Books

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◆

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Why Fascism? 8/6

◆

By 4 OXFORD MEN

Young Oxford at War

6/-

Books *by* Arthur Wragg

The Psalms for Modern Life

With an Introduction by
H. R. L. "DICK" SHEPPARD

J. A. H. IN THE BRITISH WEEKLY

"A remarkable book. It may one day prove to have been an epoch-making book. We shall only say without shame that there are illustrations in this book which, together with the text they illustrate, have moved us as the psalms have moved us in some Gothic building and chanted by some invisible choir."

BEVERLEY NICHOLS IN THE SUNDAY CHRONICLE

"A book which I find it difficult to praise too highly. . . . Here in these drawings is all that I feel about life. . . . I hope that you may be able to see them, even though it needs a strong man to look them in the face, and to admit their implications."

9th Impression, 6/-

Jesus Wept

With an Introduction by
VERNON BARTLETT

STORM JAMESON

"This book is worth the whole of the coming year's output. If I were a millionaire I would placard the country with these drawings, so that no one could escape their warning. I defy anyone who has even glanced at them to forget them."

DAILY HERALD

"Fierce though is the satire, the drawings are slashes of beauty. The little people of the country are all in this book—forced by poverty to restrict families, starved, beaten down by the system. It will shock and hurt. But it will also inspire."

3rd Impression, 7/6

Books *by* John Brown

I Was a Tramp

DAILY HERALD

"One of the most remarkable and significant autobiographies of the season."

DAILY TELEGRAPH

"It is impossible to withhold admiration for his courage and strength of character . . . at the age of 24, he had undergone experiences enough to suffice for most ordinary lives."

SPECTATOR

"It is an extraordinary picture that he traces—and he does it very well, concretely and unself-consciously. . . . I was enthralled reading about this wayward life, as odd and exciting in its way as a picaresque novel."

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COMPTON MACKENZIE (DAILY MAIL)

"The character of the author revealed in *I Was a Tramp* made a profound impression on me, and my belief in his future is strengthened by *I Saw for Myself* . . . one of the most impressive examinations both of Fascism and Communism that I have yet read.

"Mr. Brown combines a cool head with a warm heart, common sense with passionate idealism, and his book, written with unaffected directness, may be commended to anyone interested in Russia or Germany."

NEW STATESMAN AND NATION

"The almost crazy bravery which he showed in his ceaseless questioning, his continuous search for hidden armaments—over railings, or off down passages, like winking—is, although he seems oblivious of it, remarkable."

3rd Impression. Illustrated, 10/6

Adventurous Travel

Unharboured Heaths
by Katharine Götsch Trevelyan

ERIC GILLETT (SUNDAY EXPRESS)

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"A book of haunting beauty."

3rd Impression, 8/6

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by Charles Ladds

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". . . full of fun and as jolly as the seaman's shanty from which it takes its name."

First Cheap Edition, 3/6

Autobiography of a Rascal

MANCHESTER GUARDIAN

"Whatever the mixture of fact and fiction, the hero of these pages is a magnificent scoundrel. He is a great man in his way, and his narrative is so admirably written that in the excitement of even the most nefarious exploits he never once loses the reader's sympathy. This is the fundamental test of picaresque literature."

JAMES AGATE (DAILY EXPRESS)

"This is the story of a brute, but a likeable brute, and one who is never quite despicable. The book is new in kind, and every word of it rings true."

8/6

Travel & Autobiography

Sword and Spear
by Captain F. H. Mellor

MANCHESTER EVENING NEWS

"There is a gay ripple about everything he writes."

SUNDAY TIMES

"A very lively book. . . . Humour and adventure . . . inextricably mingled."

Illustrated, 15/-

Two Months' Grace
A Contemporary Odyssey
by Peter Stucley

MORNING POST

"A happy escapade . . . he misses none of the humour of the voyage. . . . The book is a gallery of classic landscapes, clear-cut in the radiant air, free even from the mists of time."

SUNDAY TIMES

". . . so very good indeed . . . he shows himself possessed of as clear and evocative a style as one has met in a travel book for a long time . . . quite unusual talent . . . the very brightest hopes of his publishers may be fulfilled."

Illustrated, 7/6

Wanderings in Tasmania
by George Porter

NEWS CHRONICLE

"Extremely attractive."

MORNING POST

"Mr. George Porter is not one of those travellers whose 'tourism' is an offence to those who are sensitive to atmosphere . . . his many-sided book can be cordially recommended to all those who are interested in the outlying provinces of the British Empire."

MANCHESTER GUARDIAN

"There is not a phase of Tasmanian life which he has not ably illustrated, and his book has besides the unassuming charm of complete sincerity."

Illustrated, 18/-

Cheap Editions

3/6 each

Julia Newberry's Diary

COMPTON MACKENZIE (DAILY MAIL)

"A most attractive little volume . . . an enchanting little book."

NEWS CHRONICLE

"An exquisite portrait. . . . Julia cannot, surely, regret that the treasures of her diary will be the constant delight of generations."

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by Mackinlay Kantor

SUNDAY TIMES

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A. J. CRONIN (From a Broadcast)

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by Michael Pravdin

EDINBURGH EVENING NEWS

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Without the Wedding
by Theodore Pratt

REYNOLDS' NEWS

"A colourful tale of life on an imaginary island. Good entertainment."

For your Library

The Heart of France

by George Slocombe

A. G. Macdonell in the Bystander

"Mr. Slocombe not only knows his continent, but can write English as well . . . could only have been written by one who loves and understands the country. Nothing could be better than his descriptions of the countryside, of the cherry orchards of Normandy, of life in a provincial town. The photographs are worthy of the writing, and that is saying a lot, for *The Heart of France* is a beautiful and understanding book."

Howard Spring in the Evening Standard

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